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HERBERT CHAUNCEY:

A MAN

MORE SINNED AGAINST THAN SINNING.

BY

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AUTHOR OF "BELOW THE SURFACE."

IN THREE VOLUMES.

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HERBERT CHAUNCEY:

A MAN MORE SINNED AGAINST THAN
SINNING.

CHAPTER I.

FESTIVITIES.

It was considered the correct thing to give a grand dinner and ball to the county families, as a token of gratitude for favours conferred. Rosamund and myself, stimulated and encouraged by friends always so anxious to help other people spend money handsomely, made extensive preparations. I cannot say I much enjoyed the prospect; the election troubles were not entirely over, and though the storm was subsiding, there was still a dangerous ground-swell. Vaughan was in gaol; his friends and admirers had started a subscription to defray the debt for which he had been

arrested; even the poorest of the working classes had responded to the appeal with joyful enthusiasm; shillings and halfpence were collected by hatfuls. But the undertaking was suddenly nipped in the bud, and by Vaughan himself. "Rather would I rot in gaol than be released at the expense of the industrious poor." Besides, it was too late; other creditors had now taken alarm and had commenced proceedings against him.

Messrs. Quickset, Harp and Co., were the firm which had sued and arrested him; it was a firm well known to many of the Meadshire gentry.

The Radicals from one end of the county to the other, of course shouted treachery and foul play. But what was more natural than that creditors should make a rush upon a man, who in a few hours' time might have snapped his fingers in their face, and claimed exemption from arrest as a member of Parliament?

The county, then, was still unquiet, when we gave our great festivity at Glenarvon House.

The order of proceedings stood thus:—an early dinner at two; music, singing, dancing, and various other amusements, for the rest of the day. This plan

enabled families at a distance to see out the entertainment and yet be home early. The company began to pour in soon after one, and swarmed all over the beautiful grounds and shrubberies; for the weather was fine, and, after receiving our guests in the great hall, we invited them to amuse themselves in the gardens until dinner.

There was a band on one of the flower terraces—it was the band of the dragoons—they played well, but eat and drank still better. There were Tyrolese singers, one of whom was found with two of my silver-spoons in his pocket. There was a Welsh harper, with an unpleasant expression of countenance, posted, as it appeared to me, at every angle of the shrubbery-walks. There was a hermit, in a moss-covered summer-house, who was to tell fortunes, but who unfortunately got tipsy early in the day, and had to be removed. There was an ingenious Frenchman, with dancing-dogs, one of whom was casually devoured by Folliott's Newfoundland dog, an accident which resulted in my paying 50*l.* compensation to the Frenchman, much to my satisfaction of course. There were other amusements after the fashion of the day. It was a whirl of excitement from morning

till night, but I believe was considered a great success.

Looking out of an upper window of the house, the scene was certainly gay. The lawns were traversed by ladies in garments of various hues, vieing in brightness with the many-tinted flower-beds among which they moved; the men wore blue rosettes, occasionally a red or blue uniform, for the county was full of soldiers, gleamed forth. There was an incessant buzz of many voices, broken by the soft laughter of women, whilst the sound of distant music ebbed and flowed with the breeze.

It was a serious business to get the company all seated at the long tables, arranged for dinner in the ancient stone corridor at the back of the house.

Apwood did not make his appearance, being still confined to his room. Folliott, Muckleworth, and others helped me to do the honours.

Once seated, the repast went on smoothly and pleasantly enough. Everything, except soup and vegetables, was served up cold, which was a comfort on a hot summer's day. The corridor was cool as a cathedral cloister, and through the stone

arches, we looked out on the shrubberies extending up the hill—a rich mass of verdure standing out clearly against the blue sky.

It was near four ere the tables were cleared for dessert. In those times we kept the fruits and sweets in some cool place, and placed them fresh on the table after the cloth was removed, instead of subjecting them as now to the steam of hot dishes, and to the stare of the company from the commencement of the dinner. It may have been uncivilized, but I think the dessert was better enjoyed.

Before the wine had travelled round, a stout gentleman rose at the end of one of the tables, making an abominable scraping on the stone floor, as he pushed back his arm-chair. I knew what was coming; it was Paul Muckleworth rising to propose my health. The ladies being present, we took the matter pretty quietly, which was a comfort. Muckleworth was short, but earnest; his face was purple, and large drops stood on his forehead, as he wound up his speech with—

“Gentlemen, I don’t ask you to drink your member’s health because he’s a gentleman, though he is one and no mistake; nor because he’s a

credit to the country, and has a head on his shoulders, and knows what's what, and is just the man for your money, and will hold his own with the best of them, for all this is stale news to you—but I ask you to drink the health of Herbert Chauncey, M.P. for Meadshire, with three times three—I would say nine times nine, only the ladies might be troubled with the noise—because he is, root and branch, pith and marrow, inside and out, True Blue! Now, gentlemen, I'll give the time!" The stone corridor echoed and re-echoed with cheers, such as country gentlemen alone can thunder forth.

I replied as soon as the cheering ceased, and of course was full of gratitude and promises of future zeal. I glanced slightly at the troubles of the past election, and regretted the tragic catastrophe at Smelterstown. Then hazarded a few expressions of good-will towards the working classes, and my intention to promote their interests, so far as was consistent with the national welfare. The idea was new then, but was pretty well received by those who understood what I meant. I am not sure that I quite understood what I meant myself; but believe I was much affected

before I sat down, and of course that was the signal for half the ladies producing their pocket-handkerchiefs, whilst even some of the gentlemen blew their noses, and drank a couple of glasses of wine without pausing. Emotions of this sort I now reckon at their true value, and am pretty sure, that neither I, nor any one, except, perhaps, my dear Rosamund, was actuated by what can be called real, genuine feeling—feeling, that is, for which you are the better afterwards.

Directly I sat down, I was addressed by a pompous gentleman, in a sky-blue satin waistcoat, sitting near me, who had been hitherto too busy with turtle soup, game pie, cold chicken, and lobster salad, to utter two consecutive sentences.

“Now, Mr. Chauncey, you will excuse me—I speak with deference. But, respecting the working classes, I wish to offer an observation. What can we do more for them? We feed them; we lodge them; we positively teach them to read and write, though I don’t see the point of it; there are workhouses for the destitute—gaols for the vicious. Ay, sir, our aboriginal population is well taken care of.” Here the orator upset his wine-glass, and Folliott struck in—

“They amuse me, the common people, especially when they are in a passion and I am in a safe place; I always took an interest in savages.”

“More shame for us that they are savages,” cried Rosamund.

“Madam,” rejoined my pompous friend in the blue satin waistcoat, “we must not quarrel with the dispensations of Providence. ‘The poor shall never cease out of the land.’”

“Well, for my part,” blurted out Eustace Pole, “I agree wholly with our kind hostess.”

“Then, sir,” replied the other, turning his head sharply, “you ought to have voted for Vaughan.”

“Then, sir, if I had been Chauncey, I would not have accepted your vote at any price.”

Folliott now, good-humouredly, struck in—

“Never mind how we voted! Chauncey is elected; the riots are put down; be satisfied, and have the goodness to pass the bottle!”

Rosamund gave the signal to withdraw, and we became rather more hilarious.

“Lord James at the election for Meadshire in ’23, roasted a whole voter alive,” began Ferris.

“Roasted a what, sir?”

“A voter! no, no! I mean an ox,” cried Ferris, correcting himself. “A whole ox, to feast his constituents.”

Then drawing his chair nearer to me, the little man began to be disagreeably confidential.

“You must allow me to say, dear coz, that Vaughan’s arrest was a clever stroke! Oh, to be sure you knew nothing about it—nothing! But it was neat—very neat; you knew your man, coz—you [✱]knew your man; all was going swimmingly for him; in another hour he would have been safe; when, heh presto! the man is in gaol, and his daughter in hysterics! Quite a break up of the family—quite!”

I let him see that his remarks were highly displeasing to me, and turned to converse with Folliott.

“Nay, nay,” persisted the shrivelled little man, “I did not mean to be indiscreet. Perhaps ’tis a subject I ought to have avoided. Nay, nay, coz, you must not mind me; I am very foolish sometimes.”

He laughed hysterically; nobody contradicted him, and there was a pause.

“Folliott,” I said, “taste that Burgundy, you will find it good; my cousin Jeffry was an excellent judge of wine.”

“And a hospitable fellow too.”

“A trump!” pronounced Muckleworth, from the adjoining table. “A good shot, a good seat across country, a glorious cellar of wine.”

A buzz of conversation drowned even Muckleworth’s bass voice. But presently I could hear him still expatiating on my cousin’s merits to two or three gentlemen near him.

“You are right, Sir Claude, perfectly right. His picture is over the door in the great hall. No, not the side door; that’s the individual in judge’s robes, with the tame monkey on his knee. Over the middle door. Him in the velveteen shooting-coat, with a bleeding pheasant hanging out of the pocket. Over the middle door, sir; done to the life. A real country gentleman of the old school, sir. He killed his own mutton, and I have heard tell he was a three-bottle man; but that’s flattery! Well, sir, what then, sir? He did love his glass and his——”

Here Muckleworth, finding half the company were listening to him, myself among the number,

gave an awkward cough, and hastily poured out a glass of water in mistake for wine.

“Pray go on, sir,” cried Ferris, pricking up his ears ; “we are all attention.”

Paul, angry and embarrassed, completed his blunder by drinking off the glass of water to the last drop.

“Do you hear the music?” said Folliott, by way of changing the subject. “How well it sounds on the flower-terrace yonder!”

“Come, Mr. Ferris,” cried Eustace Pole ; “you’re an amateur. You should lead the way to the musicians.”

“Oh, I merely trifle with the flute a little; that’s all. ’Tis more to amuse myself than others.”

“*Cela va sans dire!*” stammered Eustace Pole.

My duty that afternoon was to be civil to the ladies of the county gentlemen. It was rather hard work. Mrs. Trump was chatty and good-natured, but amazingly stout; and the pressure of her solid arm on mine began to tell after a quarter of an hour’s steady perambulation about the gardens and grounds. My arm ached for two days afterwards. Lady Cockayne was tall, stiff, and dry as a bone. She put two rigid fingers

on my arm when I offered it to her, and kept them there in a sort of admonitory manner, as if she was cautioning me to mind what I was about. Her peculiarity in a moral point of view was that she never smiled. People were in shrieks of laughter at the tricks of the dancing dogs; it was previous to the little misadventure with Follitt's Newfoundland dog. Lady Cockayne never moved a muscle of her face, but kept her two long fingers on my arm, as if reminding me of the mutability of human affairs; and merely observed that one of the dogs had a tail very like a favourite shaved poodle of Sir Claude's. We walked on; Lady Cockayne detained me by a bony indentation on my arm, in front of each of the Welsh harpers, one after the other. I thought she had a subdued passion for Welsh music, and especially for the "Noble Race of Shenkin." But after the third harper had been duly listened to and stared at, I found that Lady Cockayne had been only counting whether each harp had the same number of strings on it. I took her to the refreshment booth and offered her ice, thinking she would sit down, and so set me free. But no. Lady Cockayne's fingers trembled

for a moment, but again stiffened, and reminded me of the shortness of life, as plainly as if she said it aloud. She declined refreshment, and abruptly asked me if I was a subscriber to the "Refuge for Decayed Butlers," lately established in Wimpole Street.

Fortunately her ladyship at length felt fatigued, and, sitting down bolt upright on a garden stool, enabled me to go my way.

As the afternoon advanced, the guests drew towards the house, and dancing set in furiously in the great hall.

It was in the midst of a quadrille, and I had respectfully retreated to the door to keep out of the way of the dancers, when, even through the tumult of the music, the sound of loud and angry voices reached me from a distant part of the house. I stepped out, and hastening along the passage, found the noise proceeded from the servants' hall. There was a perfect riot on a small scale going on there. The maids were screaming. Two or three of my own men-servants, and a great many footmen and grooms of our guests, were gathered in a ring round a stolid-looking, middle-aged man, with a rather red face,

who had flung his livery-coat on the floor, and, putting himself into the attitude of self-defence familiar to Englishmen, was presenting his fists in the face of each man present, in orderly rotation, daring one and all of them to "Come on!" There was great competition to accept the challenge, but every other man seemed to be holding back his more pugnacious neighbour. I gazed in astonishment at this pugilistic *tableau vivant*, and angrily asked what was the matter.

There was a sudden hush: the maids ran away; the men slunk into different corners of the room; the stolid man picked up his livery-coat, and without any remark, gravely commenced thrusting himself into it. I then noticed that the livery was Vaughan's. An explanation was obtained in a piecemeal fashion from some of my own people. Vaughan's coachman had ridden up to the house to fetch the surgeon, Mr. Moss, who, with his three daughters, was amongst the guests. Mr. Moss was wanted to see Miss Vaughan; she was taken worse. Whilst search was made for him, the coachman had sat down in the servants' hall, and had not been there long before the men-servants began to gather round him, and amuse themselves

with "chaffing" him about the election. He was pressed to drink my health; he was asked how "poor Mr. Vaughan" liked the treadmill, &c. &c. After ten minutes' silent endurance, the coachman suddenly rose, gave one of his more pertinacious tormentors a slap in the face, and expressed a strong desire to fight all present,—“one down, another come on.” I scolded the servants, and endeavoured to pacify the coachman, but not very successfully, with a bumper of wine.

Mr. Moss was found in a state of perfect happiness in the library, busily examining a flea's eye in my new microscope. I learnt from him that Miss Vaughan had been very unwell since her father's arrest. She was staying with Colonel and Mrs. Dinder, who were near relatives. Moss thought she would never thoroughly rally till her father was released; Vaughan was as hard as iron when his pride was roused; his friends could not persuade him to accept assistance.

“What you can do,” added Moss, “is a different thing. We can do nothing.”

I was puzzled, and pressed for explanations. “How could I exercise any influence over William Vaughan, my late bitter antagonist?”

Moss was a retiring sort of man, but I gathered enough from him to feel assured that Vaughan's personal, as well as political friends, believed me to be in some way implicated in Quickset and Harp's proceedings against him.

However, for the moment, I was obliged to put the matter on one side. My guests must be attended to. Rosamund seized me directly I returned to the hall. There were fifteen young ladies who had not danced that night. "Positively you must do your duty, as M.P. for the county, and dance with each of them in succession."

I could not resist her winning smile, and for an hour or more followed her instructions implicitly.

I do not know many operations more absurd than dancing with a troubled and anxious heart, especially in the case of a gentleman no longer juvenile. I whirled six young ladies—I do not mean all at once—but one after the other, round and round the room, in six successive waltzes. It was a gymnastic performance of no mean order, for provincial ladies are sometimes heavy in hand, or used to be, in those days. With weary limbs, and thoughts wandering to the county gaol where

Vaughan was incarcerated, I continued to revolve with my fair partners, pausing occasionally to take breath, and endeavouring to throw into my countenance the look of lively satisfaction expected on such occasions. Folliott, who was waltzing with the portly daughter of the mayor of Smelterstown, and nearly knocked me down more than once, said I was practising rotatory movements for the House of Commons.

I felt grateful to Miss Isabella Ferris. She waltzed once round, and then abruptly paused and proposed going out on the lawn to see the moon "riding at her highest noon." I believe she had a tight shoe, but I was equally grateful to taste the fresh air and rest from my exertions. There was no moon, but there were stars; and Miss Isabella recited "Ye stars which are the poetry of heaven," in a hoarse whisper, whilst I listened respectfully. Unluckily a cockchafer flew in her face just as she had reached the last line, eliciting a scream of discordant vehemence that spoiled the poetry, and alarmed the guests.

The ball broke up early, for the guests came from a distance. We provided beds for as many as possible. The haunted room, where the German

courier hanged himself, was even had recourse to. We thought Miss Isabella Ferris would have enjoyed the privilege of sleeping there; but, to the surprise of everybody, she went into hysterics at the mere mention of it, and was led off sobbing to another bedroom, in a distant part of the house, close to the maid-servants', who had already turned in, and were audibly snoring in chorus. The sound, however, seemed sweet music to Miss Isabella, who smiled through her tears when she heard it, and retired to rest humbled, but contented. Folliott volunteered to sleep in the ghost's room, and, of course, next morning had a tale of horrors for the breakfast-table.

CHAPTER II.

A VISIT TO THE COUNTY GAOL.

THE following day, as soon as I could get away from my guests, I drove to Colonel Dinder's. On the road I met Moss, the surgeon, and asked him to accompany me. He told me that the summons he had received yesterday arose altogether from a false alarm. Miss Vaughan, instead of being worse, was rather better; she had received a cheering letter from her father, and the prostration of mind and body from which she so much suffered was beginning to abate.

On arriving, Moss preceded me, in order to explain that I wished to speak with the colonel on business connected with Vaughan, and, in the meanwhile, I was shown into the library. The library contained few books, but many records and trophies of an Indian life. All sorts of Oriental

curiosities filled the glass cases round the room—swords, spears, and daggers of ingeniously-vicious description, elaborate armour, grotesque pistols, and deformed matchlocks. There were costly ornaments, and highly-wrought articles of dress; also historical relics, on which the colonel set great value; the identical pen used by Clive, when a writer at Madras, the day before he ran away to join Major Laurence; a morsel of worm-eaten wood, cut out of the door of the celebrated Black Hole of Calcutta; a horseshoe, picked up in the field of Plassey; a tooth of Hyder Ali's; the boots worn by Sir Eyre Coote at the battle of Vandiwash; a comb, a broken saucer, and two small pearls belonging to the Begum of Oude; Hastings' autograph, under a glass case; a pill-box belonging to that remarkable man, and the ivory handle of his umbrella; Tippoo Sahib's dagger, apparently constructed for the purpose, first of stabbing, and then, by an easy turn of the wrist, neatly carving to mince-meat the inside of the person stabbed.

Over the chimney-piece was a picture of Warren Hastings and Sir Elijah Impey, watching the execution of the Brahmin Nuncomar. The

illustrious Hastings grasped the hand of that virtuous judge, with an air of serene gratification, which struck me as rather offensive. I stumbled over a stuffed Bengal tiger, which I at first feared was a live dog of sluggish habits, and seated myself in an arm-chair of ebony, bristling with ivory carvings of undeniable merit, but exceedingly uncomfortable to lean against.

Colonel Dinder's voice reached my ear from the adjoining room.

"Eh? Herbert Chauncey here? Just what I expected. He is an honourable man—a very honourable man—a most honourable man!"

The door opened, and the colonel marched in, more than usually excited.

"How do you do, sir? Pray sit down, sir. This is a most awkward business; but you know William Vaughan. A most eccentric man, sir; objects, on religious grounds, to duelling—a most eccentric man. But what can I do? Your conduct, sir, is most honourable; but William Vaughan is as stubborn as—"—he paused for a simile—"as a rhinoceros, sir,—a perfect rhinoceros, upon my honour."

He then suddenly lowered his voice, and, draw-

ing his chair close to mine, said, confidentially,—

“Vaughan will not meet you, sir. It’s a fact. I am perfectly convinced, though I say it with unfeigned regret, as an officer and a gentleman, that Vaughan will neither give nor accept a challenge. Oh, it’s very sad, very awkward indeed!”

The colonel took out his handkerchief, and blew his nose with much emotion. I now comprehended that he had mistaken the object of my visit, and I explained briefly that I saw no reason why Vaughan or myself should think of a duel. The colonel was disappointed: he drew himself up stiffly, and I could see I had fallen fifty per cent. in his estimation.

“Well, sir, I do not pretend to obtrude my opinion; but the correct thing, sir, the correct thing would be a meeting; that is my opinion, sir. Times are altered to what they were in my younger days. But I cannot, for the life of me, see any comfortable issue to this affair without exchanging shots; that is my opinion, sir.”

It was in vain that I urged him to be more explicit. The colonel only sat up more stiffly in his chair, and repeated over and over again the

oracular sentences I had already heard. To change the subject, I asked after Miss Vaughan. It seemed at first an unfortunate allusion, for the colonel instantly burst into angry denunciations against some person or persons unknown, who had treated him with the grossest disrespect, and diffused a spirit of insubordination through his whole household.

“A scoundrel, sir—an impudent scoundrel. Shooting by drum-head court-martial would be too good for him!” And the colonel glanced with a truculent expression of countenance towards two or three long, crooked-backed matchlocks hanging against the wall, constructed apparently for the purpose of shooting round a corner. “Shooting would be too good for him; a perfect rebel, sir—a dangerous character, sir.”

Vaughan’s coachman was the culprit. He had been duly instructed that as long as he was under Colonel Dinder’s roof he was under Colonel Dinder’s orders. John listened without moving a muscle of his countenance, but treated the information with secret contempt. He was Miss Vaughan’s coachman, not the

colonel's. So, hearing from the servants that his young mistress had had a disturbed night, he calmly harnessed his horses to the carriage, and, without saying a word to anybody, drove off to fetch the surgeon, in direct defiance of a standing order on the subject.

We were interrupted by the entrance of Mrs. Dinder and Mr. Moss. Miss Vaughan was certainly better, and thereupon I asked to be allowed to see her. My object was to assure her of my anxious wish to extricate her father from his painful position. It would comfort and encourage her.

The colonel thought this would be a highly irregular proceeding, but Mrs. Dinder and Moss took my part, and, being reminded that in councils of war the majority carried the day, he at length succumbed. Miss Vaughan was in the drawing-room, communicating by folding doors with the library. Mrs. Dinder went to fetch her, but stayed so long, that the colonel, becoming impatient, stalked into the drawing-room, leaving the doors partly open. I then heard a clear, sweet voice say, sorrowfully, but firmly :—

“Dear sir, you press me too far. I cannot and

will not see, or speak to one who has so basely injured my dear father. Nay, you would not ask me if you knew what pain the very thought of it gave me."

"Edith, Edith!" interrupted Mrs. Dinder. "Mr. Chauncey will hear you."

The colonel reappeared, bristling with indignation.

"That rascally coachman has spread a spirit of mutiny abovestairs and below! My authority's gone! Mr. Chauncey, I am nobody! Mr. Moss, I am nobody!"

We said a few words to pacify the distracted colonel, and, anxious not to vex or agitate the poor girl, took our departure—Moss to make his round of visits, myself to the county gaol at Stoke-upon-Avon.

There was a disagreeable mystery that must be cleared up, and ten minutes' conversation with Vaughan would do it. Naturally of a generous disposition, it was agreeable to my feelings, as well as soothing to my pride, to stretch out a hand of consolation and succour to one who had been so recently my stern and uncompromising antagonist.

The carriage stopped by my direction at the private residence of the governor, immediately adjoining the gaol.

I was admitted at once, and, having explained my wish to have an interview with Mr. Vaughan, was shown into a small parlour, and requested to be seated. The answer brought to me from Vaughan, was sufficiently short and simple. "He wished to know my business." Asking for writing materials, I hastily scribbled a few lines, anxiously requesting him to give me an interview. After a little delay, the door of the room was thrown open by an attendant, and Vaughan himself entered; I rose, and, advancing towards him, frankly extended my hand, saying,—

"Mr. Vaughan, believe me when I assure you that I feel deeply for your misfortunes, and am sincerely anxious to be of service to you."

He refused my hand, and, standing erect before me, gazed at me with looks of grave surprise. His countenance was pale and haggard, as of a man who had suffered much in mind and body.

"You wished to speak to me," he replied, "and

I am come to hear what you have to say. Honestly I must add, that it is sorely against my will, for I never wished to see you again."

I was somewhat disturbed by the harshness of his manner. It was discourteous thus to receive one, whose intentions were friendly; however, placing a chair for him, I asked him to be seated. He motioned it away from him, and, folding his arms, said, in the same austere voice,—

"Mr. Chauncey, this interview need not be long. I wait your pleasure."

"My object is to ascertain whether I can be of any service to you or yours. I respect and honour your character; I believe that you are a just man; be just to me. Some strong prejudice has impelled you to be my bitter enemy; let me show you there is no reason you should be so. I would fain assist you in your difficulties, but, if that may not be, let me at least prove that you have misunderstood and misjudged me."

Vaughan's pale countenance glowed for a moment with displeasure, but, struck by my earnestness, he regained composure, and, after a moment's pause, answered,—

“If I am your enemy, it is because my nature revolts from what is base, treacherous, and cruel; but I do not desire to injure you. I am a peaceful man—I hope a Christian man. I speak my sober convictions; I am not quarrelsome; I am not vindictive. But I cannot descend to acts of unmeaning courtesy; I cannot veil in hypocritical civility the feelings akin to contempt with which your conduct has inspired me. Nay, sir, be not angry. I have not sought this interview. You have been the cause to myself, and to my only friend,”—here his voice for a moment lost its firmness—“of melancholy disaster; the cause to me of worldly ruin—to him of the bitterest affliction, and, as I believe from my heart, of an untimely and sudden death. Why do you start, sir? No one is so well aware of this as Mr. Herbert Chauncey!”

“Sir,”—I exclaimed, as my heart beat fast with honest anxiety—“Sir, this meeting may at least lead to a result I have earnestly longed for, and should greatly prize. It may enable me to vindicate my character, so long and so unjustly aspersed. I am not affronted by what you have said. You are labouring under a delusion. Grant

me only a patient hearing, and I shall be satisfied."

He regarded me with attention, then said,—
"Your words are reasonable; whether sincere or not, I cannot say."

"Tell me," I continued, "all that is on your mind. Suspend your judgment till you hear what I have to say in my defence. This is but common justice, and I ask no more."

We seated ourselves by common consent, and for a few moments there was silence. Then Vaughan, resting his arm on the table near him, and shading his eyes with his hand, began thus:—

"My mind is perplexed and sorrowful. The spectacle of vice triumphant—of villany unchecked—overpowers me more than the consciousness of my own misfortunes. You have shown calmness and self-command, since I entered this room. Maintain, if it be possible, the same demeanour, whilst I proceed to hold up to your mind's eye a simple, but faithful picture of the part you have played during the last few months."

After a few moments' consideration he went on as follows—

“You knew James Hartley, but not as I knew him. He was my companion, first in childhood, then through the joys and sorrows of school, and latterly in the rough trials of manhood. Enough of that. His disposition was noble and generous; certainly he was passionate; but his passion was under control, save when exasperating wickedness or cruelty stung him to the quick.” He paused as if to collect his thoughts. I listened with anxious attention.

“I say that his disposition was noble. He was capable of the purest and most disinterested attachment to those he believed to be worthy of it. No woman was more tenderly, more devotedly beloved, than Ada Littlecot was beloved by Hartley. You shudder, sir, at that name. I see it well. But do not interrupt me. My statement would be incomplete without allusion to that unhappy girl; Hartley loved her with all the ardour of his nature. For months he brooded over his passion in silence. Sir Hugh was favourable to his suit—asked him to his house—gave him encouragement in indirect ways. At length Hartley conquered his timidity—threw himself at Miss Littlecot’s feet—implored her to have

pity upon him. She was deeply moved by the heartfelt earnestness of his passion. She wept, but weeping told him she never could be his, and that he must forget her. In bitter grief he despairingly pressed his suit. Miss Littlecot confessed that her heart was another's. Who that other was, Hartley had no difficulty in ascertaining. Nay, your engagement was soon made public. He retired into the country, almost broken-hearted. A few months passed; what was his astonishment—his rage—to find that the woman, who had rejected him for another's sake, was by that other deliberately and contemptuously abandoned! that this successful rival had robbed him of all that he held dear in life solely to cast it unenjoyed aside! But that was not all. Miss Littlecot was seriously ill. A gentle and sensitive creature, she could not bear up against the shock of your pitiless and undeserved cruelty."

I listened with sorrow, but not with anger, to the harsh words that fell in measured accents from his lips. From Vaughan's point of view my conduct to Ada must have appeared such as he had described. He knew not the motives

that had influenced me, nor the long and painful struggle the resolution had cost me. When he mentioned, however, that Ada's health had given away, my calmness was shaken—a thrill of apprehension passed through me—I buried my face in my hands.

“Believe me,” continued Vaughan, “I should rejoice from the bottom of my heart, if by any means it could be shown that you were not that base, unhappy man which circumstances have compelled me to regard you. I had no thought of this meeting, nor of this discussion. But I have here”—and he took out a pocket-book, and drew from it a letter—“a communication from Sir Hugh Littlecot, received by Hartley in reply to one he wrote soon after your marriage. It was enclosed by Hartley in a letter, affectionately bidding me farewell, left for my perusal before his fatal seizure. He wished his best friend to know how much he had suffered, how much he had endured. Read it.” And he presented me the letter. I received it, and opened it with an unsteady hand. It was dated some months before.

“MY DEAR HARTLEY,

“Your letter received this morning has deeply affected me. It gave me a bitter pang to reflect that had my darling better appreciated your worth, she might have been spared the misery and disgrace inflicted on her. But the noble sentiments you have so admirably expressed fall like balm upon my wounded spirit. Would that I could give you the faintest hope of the realization of your wishes! Would that even yet, after Ada’s grief had spent itself, you might renew your suit with some prospect of ultimate success! But I tell you, with all the anguish of unwilling conviction, that for her, all plans of earthly happiness are vanity and delusion! From the day when that man broke faith with her—from the day he wrung her gentle heart, and trampled her young affections under foot, and tossed her from him as a worthless toy—she never raised her head. I saw coming disaster in her wasted cheek and hollow eye; but little did I know what was impending. As you are aware, it is now barely five weeks since the calamity fell upon us.

“The blood-vessel she broke was but small—

the loss of blood insignificant. The doctors make light of it—nay, smile at my anxiety; but a father's instinct, watching over an only child, cannot deceive him. My friend, I tell you in plain terms, that man has murdered her. 'He has said in his heart, Tush, I shall never be cast down; there shall no harm happen unto me. His mouth is full of cursing, deceit, and fraud; under his tongue is ungodliness and vanity. He sitteth lurking in the thievish corners of the street, and privily in his lurking dens doth he murder the innocent.' But look elsewhere: 'I will follow upon mine enemy, and overthrow him, neither will I turn again till I have destroyed him. I will smite him that he shall not be able to stand, but fall under my feet. He shall cry, but there shall be none to help him. I will beat him as small as the dust before the wind; I will cast him out as the clay in the street.'

"Forgive me, Hartley—forgive me. But when I see my sweet innocent fading away before me, day by day, and when I think of that *thing* who first supplanted you in her affections, and then abandoned her, and who is now happy—yes, happy; puffed up, and bloated with prosperity;

honoured, respected, talked of as a fit man—nay, as the only fit man—to represent the county in Parliament; when I think of all this, I lose my self-possession; I clench my teeth in silent despair, and in the solitude of my chamber I curse him from my heart. Yes, she would have accepted you, she would have married you, she and you would have been happy; but at the very moment when you were beginning to make progress, when you had sacrificed so much—ay, even to giving up your most cherished political opinions—the creature stepped between you and her. You may remember how he laboured to outshine you in conversation—how he ever contrived to drag forwards topics, strange to you, but familiar to him—how he was ever on the watch to interrupt with impudent self-complacency your brief and unfrequent interviews with our darling Ada. And all for what?

“ Well, well, it is useless to rip up the past. He has gained his point; he has won the day. He first outwitted yourself, then deceived a poor, confiding, tender-hearted girl—a sorry triumph! We have all of us been trifled with, Hartley. We have afforded sport to him. But let us be patient

—let us gulp down the insult meekly. I am sorry the man is thinking of standing for the county; he will assuredly defeat you if you attempt to contest it. You are honourable and conscientious; he is—you know what. You will not have the remotest chance. I throw this out as a friendly hint. ‘Every dog has his day.’ We must be patient, and put the best face on the matter we can.

“You ask when my darling goes abroad. We start so as to reach Italy before the rough autumn weather sets in. No, I cannot show your letter to her or allude in the remotest degree to the subject. I told her to-day that I was writing to you. She raised her eyes languidly, whilst a little colour came into her cheeks, saying,—‘Remember me to him, and say that I wish him well.’ Then added half to herself, ‘He was kind and faithful, and I trust that Heaven will bless him. We shall never meet again in this world!’ She is right, Hartley; you will never see Ada again. But be patient. What is done cannot be undone. And now I must conclude. You shall hear from me again, though I fear the intelligence will be very sad. I cannot look for-

ward; that way is madness. Accept my thanks once more, and believe me,

“Your sincere friend,

“HUGH LITTLECOT.

“Alphonse has returned to my service, and of course accompanies me. He is not only the most active and most thoughtful of travelling servants, but will watch over Ada with affectionate fidelity. It was thus he tended her brother, the poor lad who died.”

I read this letter with emotion; my conviction of the purity of my intentions was shaken, my self-respect disturbed.

It was a passing weakness: I struggled against it, and attempted to justify my conduct. As for desiring to injure Hartley, I repudiated the notion with scorn; Sir Hugh had calumniated me. I had never been aware of his attachment to Ada; it had taken me by surprise. I mourned over the sufferings I had unwittingly caused; I should ever regard her illness as a calamity to myself, as a blow to my own peace. But worse might have happened, if, when my heart had become another's, I had consented to a life-long union.

“Your argument would justify the meanest and most selfish treachery—the grossest infidelity,” rejoined my companion, still gazing at me with sternness, but as I thought in a voice less harsh and severe. “You have worshipped self, and in your pride you imagine you have obeyed your conscience. Reflect on the misery you have spread around you—Ada dying, Hartley dead, myself ruined. For the calamity you have brought upon me I care but little—little for myself, more perchance for my now impoverished child.”

“What!” I cried, “am I to be made accountable for still further disasters? Am I to be denounced as the author of your pecuniary embarrassments, of your private and personal troubles? Because, when goaded by calumny, I contested the county, and dared my enemies to prove my guilt, am I to be condemned as the cause of your ruin? Is that just, sir? is that honest?”

“My sudden arrest at a critical moment for a debt of large amount, spread alarm and distrust through the whole body of my creditors. In business, Mr. Chauncey, credit is our life-blood; disturb it, and we are lost. My solvency became a matter

of suspicion; a panic seized my creditors; demands poured in upon me; men who a few weeks ago would have waited my time, and consulted my convenience for years, pressed upon me with hungry vehemence. The most powerful firms must succumb to such a simultaneous onslaught as I have experienced. I have been forced to abandon everything; to sell off at ruinous prices; to break contracts which, had these harpies been content to wait but a few short weeks, would have satisfied them, and reinstated myself in credit and fortune. My character has been secretly assailed in mercantile circles, and even my best friends have faltered at the spectacle of my misfortunes. I have sacrificed everything, save a small residue of some few thousand pounds. With that I purpose withdrawing from this neighbourhood—from this country—and seeking an asylum in a foreign land for my daughter and myself.”

Vaughan’s manner affected me as much as the announcement itself. His attitude was calm and simple; he spoke in a tone of manly resignation, but without bitterness or resentment.

“Still,” I exclaimed, after taking two or three hurried turns up and down the room—“still, why

am I to be regarded as the direct author of your reverses? I acted throughout the election without the smallest intention of causing you injury; I am not responsible for your arrest; I am guiltless of your imprisonment; you knew your pecuniary obligations before you started as a candidate."

"What!" rejoined Vaughan, with a brief movement of indignation—"what! was it not you yourself that urged on these men; nay, that compelled them in self-defence to arrest me? Did you not artfully avail yourself of that despicable expedient to secure your return for the county, when you knew all others were vain, and that in another hour I must have been carried by a decisive majority?"

"It is false!" I replied, with angry impatience. "Such an artifice is foreign to my nature. I would have scorned it. Sir, you totally misconceive my character. I have borne much from you. But your accusations touch my honour, and are too insolently reckless for me longer to endure——"

"Here, sir," rejoined Vaughan, "is the letter from Messrs. Quickset and Harp, which I received

simultaneously with the writ. I have stated nothing which I cannot prove."

I seized it eagerly, and read as follows :—

"SIR,

"Our firm desires me to express their regret in proceeding to extremities in the matter of the bill now overdue, particulars of which are herewith enclosed. The critical state of the money market, and extraordinary pressure from parties in the country, compel us to deviate from our usual course. The most urgent of our creditors is Mr. Herbert Chauncey, of Glenarvon Court, your neighbour. We have in vain applied for three days' delay, which, if conceded, would have enabled us to postpone the unpleasant step we have been obliged to take. Mr. Apwood, his steward, acting under Mr. Chauncey's express instructions, and duly advised that we should be driven, in self-defence, to fall back upon yourself, has peremptorily refused the trifling accommodation asked.

"We can only remark that it is not in accordance with Mr. Chauncey's usual courtesy, whilst it is almost unprecedented in transactions of the

kind. Individually our firm continues to place implicit confidence in your integrity. But the large interests at stake, and the temper displayed by other parties having claims on us, oblige us to sacrifice personal feeling, and proceed in the way of business. We have every confidence that your numerous and respectable connections will enable you to settle the account on demand. Should this unfortunately not be the case, you will, we trust, perceive that the fault does not rest with our firm, but with Mr. H. Chauncey and our other creditors. I beg to subscribe myself,

“(For self and partners),

“Your obliged and humble servant,

“SIMEON HARP.”

“I have had dealings with these men before,” observed Vaughan; “and it was always understood that my bills would be renewed at this season of the year, by giving one month’s notice. I gave the notice, and received a reply, which, at the time, appeared satisfactory, but which I now think evasive. The sudden panic spread over commercial circles was, of course, unforeseen by me

as by others. It is that which has alone prevented my raising funds to meet this demand. Some secret pressure from other quarters may have been applied, but your agent's action in the matter is unmistakeable. Here is Mr. Apwood's letter, enclosed in the one you have just read."

It ran thus :—

" GENTLEMEN,

" In our recent interview, I was at pains to point out the absolute necessity of your making arrangements for payment of the mortgage money with interest to date. I am the more surprised, therefore, at yours of the 29th ult., just come to hand, in which you ask for delay in order to avoid putting Mr. William Vaughan to serious inconvenience. I have nothing to do with Mr. Vaughan's affairs, and consider your reference to him indelicate and unbusiness-like. By this post you will receive notice of action from our London solicitors, and must please to understand that proceedings will not be stayed unless the money be paid to Mr. H. Chauncey's credit at the Meadshire Provincial Bank, Stoke-upon-Avon, by the 5th instant. Regretting that duty to

my employer obliges me to take these unpleasant steps.

“I am, gentlemen,

“Yours most obediently,

“HENRY APWOOD.

“I have Mr. H. Chauncey’s special instructions to push matters to extremity.

“H. A.”

This was dated two days previous to the day of polling.

I was greatly taken aback by the contents of this letter. Apwood was my man of business. To him I had confided the whole of my pecuniary arrangements during the election. In the heat of the conflict, harassed by the violent abuse showered upon me, and eager for victory, I had empowered him to raise the necessary funds by all means at his command. But further than that. On his naming to me that the Messrs. Harp were dilatory and refractory in respect to the payment of the large sum left in their hands on my coming into my property, I had not scrupled to assent to Apwood’s suggestion, that sharp measures should be adopted. Certainly I was wholly

ignorant of the relations subsisting between them and Vaughan. In fact, I trusted everything to Apwood's tact and judgment. The world, however, would take none of these circumstances into consideration. The world would conclude not only that Apwood had persuaded or compelled Messrs. Quickset and Harp to arrest my rival, but that he had acted under direct instructions from myself.

Vaughan was the last man to lay himself open to the suspicion of eluding his creditors by screening himself behind the privileges of Parliament. It had been his boast to the freeholders of Meadshire, that he was "an honest Englishman, neither more nor less." A spirit less chivalric than his would have hesitated to enter Parliament under circumstances so humiliating.

The arrest was an artfully contrived manœuvre to effect Vaughan's discomfiture, and my triumph. It seemed of a piece with much of my conduct before and during the struggle, and stamped me with the character of a man heartless and dishonourable in his public and his private relations of life.

The letters dropped from my hand, and I sat for a few moments revolving in much trouble what

course I ought to adopt. The painful recollections Vaughan had brought to my mind, and all the sharp anxieties of the last few months, pressed upon me heavily. One thing I would at least secure—I would keep my honour above suspicion. There should be no doubt upon that point. Life itself was worthless without it.

Hastily seizing the writing materials on the table, I wrote two letters. One was addressed to the Secretary of the Treasury, expressing my wish to accept the stewardship of the Chiltern Hundreds, with a view to vacating my seat in Parliament. The other was addressed to Messrs. Quickset and Harp, disavowing all knowledge of Apwood's proceedings, and offering security for Vaughan's debts, with a view to his immediate liberation. I placed the two letters in Vaughan's hands, saying,—

“Mr. Vaughan, I declare on my honour that I am wholly guiltless of contributing, directly or indirectly, to your arrest; but I am weary of making protestations. It is necessary I should act. Read these letters.”

Vaughan heard me with surprise. He took the papers and read them carefully. Then, raising

his face, the stern lines of which were softened by unwonted emotion, he exclaimed, aloud to himself,—

“These papers are certainly written in all sincerity. It were unmanly scepticism to doubt it.” He then tore them to fragments, and, to my surprise, leaned forwards, seized my hand, and pressed it with warmth. I returned the pressure, and for a few moments we were silent. Then he added,—

“I listened to you on the hustings. Your words, your whole demeanour, denoted an honest man. Yet I knew that you had injured my friend—that you had outraged virtue and truth. I concluded the speech to be mere acting, and I admired your dramatic power. Now that I have seen you and heard you face to face, now that you have given me proofs of the integrity of your heart and the purity of your intentions, I confess myself conquered if not convinced. You erred once, and you have tasted already the bitter fruits. Well, the future is before you; you will probably make yourself a distinguished name. I am a ruined man about to depart into voluntary exile; it seems a mockery therefore to say it, but if at any

time hereafter I can render you a service, do not fail to let me know."

He rose, and refusing to listen to my renewed offers of assistance, bade me heartily farewell. An officer was waiting for him outside, and Vaughan returned with him to the debtors' prison.

CHAPTER III.

MR. HENRY APWOOD.

My impatience to call Apwood to account for his extraordinary conduct was great, but he was still confined to his house by illness. After waiting a day or two, however, I resolved to see him, if it were only for five minutes. It was with difficulty that I induced the maid to admit me, but at length succeeded, and found Apwood seated in dressing-gown and slippers, with toast-and-water on the table beside him, in his small study. So far there was a dash of the invalid about him. Otherwise, I must say he looked pretty hearty.

On the chimney-piece were a row of letters, ready for the post. Some men are absurdly fidgety about keeping their letters private; Apwood appeared to be one of them, for his first movement on my unexpected entrance, was to sweep up the letters, one after the other, and stuff

them into his pockets. This is the very way to attract attention, and my eye travelled over the addresses on the letters as he caught them up, almost against my will. The only address, however, that I particularly noticed, was Alphonse Legrange, the name of Sir Hugh Littlecot's servant. Months afterwards this little circumstance recurred to my mind. At the time it did not dwell in my memory.

I apologized to Apwood for intruding, hoped the interview would do him no harm, promised not to occupy him long, and then in temperate language remonstrated with him on his conduct.

Much as I valued his services it was difficult for me to see how I could retain him as my steward. But I would hear what he had to say, at all events.

I went first into Vaughan's arrest. It was the matter that pressed most heavily upon my mind. Apwood looked exceedingly uncomfortable when I sat down and began the conversation. At the first pause, he hastily struck in, stopping now and then to cough, or sip his toast-and-water; and as he proceeded, became more animated, and his cough less troublesome.

“Believe, me, my dear sir, I acted for the best—believe me, I did. No honest employé could have acted otherwise. You are too kind-hearted, too benevolent—scrupulously honest yourself, you cannot understand any man being the contrary. But you must learn to do so, my dear sir, indeed you must. ’Tis a painful lesson, but there’s no help for it; the Messrs. Harp are far too tricky to be trusted; ask Ferris what he thinks of them. As for what they said about Vaughan, ’t was a dodge—an impudent dodge, and if I had loosened my hold of them, they would have just kept the mortgage money, and arrested Vaughan all the same; trust them for that! I hate humbug and shuffling; always did from a boy upwards. Besides, my dear sir, consider; you gave me *carte blanche* to spend money; what was the use unless I had money to spend? Cash I wanted, and cash I got. But it was only by putting the screw on Harp and Co.; what else could I do?”

What Apwood said was plausible enough. Yet, though, a few minutes previous, I was secretly wishing he might be able to make out a good case—being a man so useful to me, and for whom it would be so difficult to find a substitute—now,

I was out of temper at having the worst of the argument, and brought up more of my forces.

“Mr. Apwood, I have more than one ground of complaint against you, and, as you well know, have only waited till your health was restored to speak out plainly to you on the subject. Look at the mischief you caused me on the day of nomination! At the moment I had touched the hearts and won the confidence of the multitude, a troop of armed men burst upon the scene, kindle the fury of my enemies, and harden every heart for ever against me. Whose fault was that, I ask? It was but the prelude to this miserable stratagem of the arrest, and the popular outbreak that followed. The blood of my countrymen, my poor ignorant but warm-hearted countrymen, has been shed; a life has been lost. I enter Parliament, abhorred by the bulk of my constituents, and distrusted by the remainder.”

I paced to and fro with indignation enhanced by my own description of what had occurred.

Apwood hesitated for a moment, and then, rising from his chair, advanced towards me, with looks of sincere sympathy and regard, exclaiming—

“My very dear sir, you are too gloomy in your

view of the matter—too gloomy by far. Society is not composed of wooden-headed peasants, or of black-fisted miners ; society reflects, compares, judges. It will—nay, it has already acquitted you of all blame in this business. As for the dragoons, I protest I thought your own life, and the lives of all our friends, in the utmost extremity of danger. I could not foresee the success of your bold and manly policy towards the populace, for you had never given me a hint of what you were going to do. Mr. Muckleworth, and other leading magistrates, were quite of my mind. Besides, sir, it was not so much the dragoons, it was Mrs. Chauncey's presence, that exasperated the mob."

"Apwood, I will not have Mrs. Chauncey's name dragged into this discussion. I repeat it; the drawn sabres of the dragoons drove the poor people frantic."

"I beg your pardon if I have said anything to displease you ; it was my unlucky fall over that ugly fence, else I should have managed the matter properly, and all would have come right. But you yourself know ; Mrs. Chauncey knows ; if not, Crawdle, my medical attendant, can tell you, what a state I was in when I reached

Glenarvon that day. Why, I narrowly escaped concussion of the brain! As it was, I strained my chest sadly, and it is not well yet; as you may hear by my cough. But, with respect to Harp and Co., I insist upon it 'twould have been folly to trust them—perfect folly. Why did they not write straight to you if they really wished to spare William Vaughan? Why did they not appeal direct to you?”

It was true. The Messrs. Harp ought to have applied to me direct. Nevertheless, I was far from being satisfied, and my manner showed it. Apwood, after a moment's silence, said, rather sorrowfully,—

“I perceive, sir, that you are still dissatisfied, and I am sorry for it. All I can say is, that I have spared no pains to promote your interests, and I think you know it. Your estate is in a very much improved condition; your tenants are contented. I have laboured to serve you even to the injury of my health. However, if you have ceased to place confidence in me, perhaps it will be better we should part. The election accounts are complicated, and must be examined and settled. After that, sir, if such is your will and

pleasure, I will place my situation at your disposal."

He was agitated, and my heart smote me. I felt I was dealing with him harshly. I went up to him, took him by the hand, and, apologizing for the roughness with which I had reproached him, assured him that I appreciated his services, and hoped that he would continue to give me the benefit of them.

Apwood received what I said in a proper spirit. Without being obsequiously grateful, he expressed himself satisfied, and begged me not to dwell upon the matter further. After some conversation on other subjects, we parted.

Two or three days after, came a letter from Messrs. Quickset and Harp, in answer to one from myself, written after my visit to Vaughan, that caused me both surprise and pain. They first explained how their firm was situated, at the date of Apwood's application for payment of the money. To this I did not give much heed. They then proceeded to inform me that so far from having acted without a direct appeal to myself, they addressed to me a full and explicit statement immediately on the receipt of the notice of action, and, not

receiving any reply, had then resorted to the extreme measure I now so much deprecated and deplored, but which was the only means of satisfying their own creditors, and, as they believed, of staying the action commenced against them in my name.

But what had become of this letter? That was the question I had to solve. Amidst the whirl of the election battle there was no doubt I had given much less attention than usual to business not immediately connected with it. I had postponed, and, perhaps, in some instances, entirely omitted to answer letters that were not of pressing importance. All this was true. But I was perfectly certain that a communication of such urgency would have instantly received attention at my hands. I never could have had the letter; of that I was convinced.

I inquired of Ferris, who was well acquainted with the firm. He broke into a succession of mysterious pantomimic gestures, mingled with cautious insinuations, but would not commit himself to any distinct statement. I left his office not much wiser than I entered it, except so far as to find my suspicions strengthened. Of course,

inquiries at the post-office came to nothing, and Messrs. Harp themselves had not entered the copy of the letter in their letter-book, being of a confidential character. It was posted with their other letters. It was rare that any of them miscarried. They evidently believed that the letter must have reached me.

Our correspondence became rather warm. Their debt had now been discharged, and, being no longer under any obligation to me, they evinced a disposition to be impertinent. I consulted some of my political friends, and was advised to send the letters that had passed between us to the *Meadshire Mercury*, and other local newspapers.

I trusted that at all events this course would show that I was not inculpated in the proceedings against Vaughan, and had been a passive instrument in the matter, from first to last.

Meantime, I was able by quiet, but unremitting exertion, to assist in winding up Vaughan's affairs, and expediting his release.

So ended, as I hoped and believed, the troubles and anxieties of my election for Meadshire. How far I was right the reader will soon learn.

CHAPTER IV.

A MOONLIGHT WALK.

THE morning fixed for our departure from Glenarvon would have been very sad, had it not been for the parliamentary life to which I looked forwards, and the excitement of novelty to which Rosamund, like most young women, was by no means indifferent.

The place was in full beauty, and as I paced the lawn, under the broad shadow of the horse-chesnuts, and beheld the picturesque old mansion, its gray walls, and mullioned windows, half shrouded in masses of ivy, basking in the warm sunshine, the peace and loveliness of the scene impressed me more forcibly than ever. Certainly such a home was a great gift, not merely in respect of the material comfort it afforded me, but the more refined enjoyment of simply

gazing my fill upon its beauty. The responsibility attaching to gifts or talents of any sort was not, however, at that time very burdensome to my conscience. I paced to and fro, listening now to the ceaseless murmur of the brook, and now to the song of a blackbird in the adjacent woods, cleaving the air with notes of sober gladness.

Rosamund's still sweeter note, however, struck upon my ear, and, looking up, I saw her face bending forth from her chamber window amidst a bower of myrtle encircling it. She laughingly scolded me for wasting my time when I ought to be busy indoors, packing up books and papers.

"For once I shall be ready first," she cried, "and then you will never be able to blame me again for being unpunctual. Winifred and I have quite finished. I have sent her to help you in the library; she is so clever at packing!"

I heard this with a shudder, for my horror of a maid-servant meddling with my papers was intense, ever since a zealous housemaid had put my library-table "to rights," and carefully torn up, for allumettes, the fair copy of an article for a magazine I had sat up half the night to finish.

On entering the library I summarily dismissed Winifred, and went on with the arrangement of my papers and books. I had not been long thus employed, when, lifting the box in which I kept my answered letters, I perceived an unopened letter lying beneath it. Concluding that it was one that had come by post that morning but had been accidentally passed over, I carelessly tore open the seal, and discovered it was dated a few days before the election, and must have been there ever since. But my vexation was great to find that it was from Messrs. Quickset and Harp; the identical letter they maintained had been sent to me, and which I had vehemently denied—denied in the public prints—ever to have received. If I had only examined the letter before breaking the seal, I should have seen what it was, for Mr. Simeon Harp's handwriting was peculiar.

The contents of the letter were what had been represented. An appeal from the firm for a week's delay; otherwise, as a measure of self-defence, and to satisfy their creditors, it would be necessary to proceed against Mr. William Vaughan. References in support of their statements were furnished, with an offer to show

their books to any accredited agent I might name. An immediate answer was requested.

I turned the letter over and over, read and re-read it, but could form no other conjecture than that, in the bustle of the election contest, it must have escaped notice—been accidentally pushed on one side, and remained all this time concealed under the letter-box.

None of my servants knew anything of the letter. It seemed to be nothing more nor less than a distressing mischance, for which no one, except perhaps myself, was in any way to blame.

I was so much disturbed by this discovery, that we postponed our journey till next day. It gave me an opportunity of consulting Apwood. He stayed to dinner.

“It won’t do to burn the letter, and say no more about it, I suppose?” was Apwood’s first observation.

I rejected the notion without hesitation. I was bound to acquaint the Messrs. Harp with the discovery of the letter, and that immediately. I should write by next post. Apwood, being now convalescent, volunteered to run up to town by the night mail, see them personally, and, without

compromising myself, dissuade them from making the matter public. I may as well mention that the Messrs. Harp acknowledged the receipt of my letter briefly, but not uncivilly. Apwood saw them, and I gathered from his report of the interview, that they were disposed to let the affair drop into oblivion.

After parting with Apwood that same evening, Rosamund and myself arranged to have a long walk on the hill, and bid adieu to the beautiful scenery of Glenarvon. Just as we were starting, the village constable called, with some blank summonses for me to fill up and sign. Rather impatiently I sat down, pen in hand, whilst Rosamund said she would walk slowly up the hill to enable me to overtake her. There were a good many summonses, most of them for non-payment of poor-rates. Many of our parishioners made a point of never paying until summoned; a practice that invested them with a certain degree of importance, owing to the trouble it caused the parish officers. I scribbled my name on each as fast as I could put pen to paper, and had completed my task, when there was a ring at the front-door bell.

"Another interruption! This is too bad!" was my exclamation, when a servant entered, and informed me that a lady wished to see me for a few minutes.

It was rather strange for visitors to call at eight in the evening. Rosamund was waiting for me. It was annoying, and I stepped out into the porch to anticipate my visitor, and bring our interview all the sooner to a close.

Directly I reached the steps a pretty little dog sprang up upon me, and caressed me with cries of delight. It was Charlie, Ada Littlecot's dog, which I had last seen just after my rough encounter with poor Hartley. Immediately in front of the entrance was a one-horse carriage, with luggage on the top; and inside, a lady in deep mourning. It was very absurd, but suddenly seeing Ada's little favourite simultaneously with the lady in the carriage, I changed colour and my heart beat fast. Could it be Ada herself? It was too wildly improbable a notion, and was dismissed as soon as formed. I approached the carriage. It was a hired one, but John, Mr. Vaughan's coachman, was standing by the steps. He eyed me suspiciously, touched his hat with

an expression of countenance plainly implying the courtesy was only a form, and said his "young missus," meaning Miss Vaughan, was in the carriage.

At the same moment a young, pale-looking girl, with brown hair, parted in bands over her forehead, turned her face towards me from the carriage. I saw the likeness to Vaughan. There was the same regularity of feature, the same calm thoughtfulness, but more softness and delicacy of expression. A slight colour warmed her cheek as her eye caught mine, and, in the sweet voice I had heard at Colonel Dinder's, she apologized for calling at that hour, and hoped it was no inconvenience.

I had no option but to beg her to descend and enter the house. As we went towards the drawing-room, Winifred passed us. I desired her to follow her mistress up the hill, and let her know that I was detained by a visitor. The girl seemed always glad to oblige me, and a few moments after I caught sight of her mounting the hill at a pace that would have astonished the ordinary type of town lady's-maid. Miss Vaughan had lowered her veil on entering the house, but as

soon as we were seated in the drawing-room, she raised it again, and, looking at me steadily with her clear blue eyes, said,—

“I join my father this evening at Stoke-on-Avon. We are going to London by the night mail, and from thence to France. I may not see you again, and I wished to thank you, sir, for your goodness to us. Had it not been for your aid my father would have been imprisoned for weeks—perhaps months. You have been very, very kind, sir; and I thank you for it.”

The perfect calmness with which she spoke, and the modest simplicity of her manner, might have led a careless observer to think she was merely discharging a cold and formal duty. But there was a tearful haze over those blue eyes, and a tremulousness in her voice, which showed how deeply she felt what she was saying. I assured her that the pleasure experienced in being of some small service to Mr. Vaughan was greatly enhanced by knowing that I was contributing to mitigate her own sorrow and anxiety. My sympathy with the poor girl about to accompany her father to a foreign country, leaving the comforts of a happy English home behind her, perhaps

for ever, was sincere, and' my manner showed it. I judged that she, as well as Vaughan, was now disabused of the unfavourable opinion once entertained of me. No allusion, indeed, was made to my visit to the Dinders, nor to her emphatic refusal to see me. But her words, her looks, expressed a gentle, quiet thankfulness and deferential regard that assured me of her entire good-will.

We talked a little about her father's future plans. Almost insensibly we glided into the subject of poor Hartley's death, the original cause of Vaughan's misfortune. Feeling a deep anxiety to stand well in the opinion of the young and pure-minded creature whom I was addressing, I touched upon the cause of my unhappy dispute with Hartley.

Miss Littlecot was Edith Vaughan's friend. I felt a vague hope that what I said might reach her ears. If I had known the misery I should have caused, I knew not, I said, that I should have had fortitude or nerve to take the step I did. Far was it from me to vindicate my conduct to others. Whatever my own conscience told me, I knew well that I could never in this world hope to be understood.

Time glided on. The shades of evening gathered over the landscape without. Edith's voice and manner, so composed, so gentle, yet so earnest, soothed my vexed and unquiet mind. Suddenly, however, my companion looked at her watch and rose to go. I offered my arm, and led her through the hall to the front entrance, where the carriage still waited.

At the instant we emerged from the porch we were met by Rosamund, returning from her walk. She started with surprise on beholding us: Edith Vaughan withdrew her arm from mine. I advanced a step or two and introduced them, explaining in a few words that Miss Vaughan had called upon me on her road to Stoke, and that we had been conversing on her father's affairs. Dear Rosamund seemed tired and put out. She bowed haughtily, and passed into the house without a word. I assisted Edith into the carriage; she was anxious to start, as the evening was wearing on, and her father was expecting her. We shook hands after a few kind words, and parted.

I had intended gently remonstrating with Rosamund, but no sooner did I enter the great hall

than I found myself placed on the defensive. I had never yet seen her so excited. There was a bright crimson spot on each cheek, and her eyes sparkled with indignation.

“How unkind to leave me two hours pacing up and down the top of that dreary hill, waiting for you! How very unkind! And our last night at Glenarvon, too! I never dreamed of your treating me thus!—never!”

She flung her hat on the sofa, and her hair fell in thick folds over her shoulders. I explained that the visit was unexpected—that I was obliged to see Miss Vaughan—that I had immediately despatched a message to her.

“No, I have had no message—none whatever. I have been wandering to and fro for hours, expecting you every moment, and now I come home and find you arm-in-arm with a strange girl—doing the amiable, no doubt, very agreeably. But it is very unkind to me, very wrong—nay, very wicked—to break your word and not come to meet me!”

She shook her dark hair off her face, and, seizing her hat, was leaving the room. But I followed and begged her to hear reason. She was

beginning to relent, when an unlucky incident occurred, which I must briefly mention.

Outside the hall-door, in the stone passage, was suddenly heard a furious growling and snarling, followed by the noise of dogs fighting. We opened the door and found my friend Charlie in desperate encounter with a little Italian greyhound belonging to dear Rosamund. I parted them with difficulty. Charlie's long silken hair had in some measure protected him from the sharp teeth of his antagonist, who, on the other hand, emerged from the contest with one of his ears covered with blood.

Rosamund was in a moment on her knees examining and caressing her favourite, whilst tears ran down her flushed cheeks. Meantime, Charlie flew to me for sympathy and approbation, springing almost into my arms, and licking first one hand, then the other. It was very awkward.

Rosamund exclaimed—

“Why, the horrid wretch knows you, Herbert! The cruel little spiteful brute! Where did it come from?—whose is it?”

I was, I confess, rather confused. Evidently

the little dog was in Miss Vaughan's charge, and had either escaped from the carriage, or been left behind in the hurry of departure. I answered something to that effect.

"But how did you come to be such friends with the little wretch?" persisted Rosamund. "What is that name on the collar? It is not Vaughan. Tell me, Herbert; for I am afraid to touch it, lest it should bite me."

The collar was a small silver chain with a silver plate, and on the plate, in very tiny characters, was inscribed, "Ada Littlecot."

Whilst I was handling the collar, Rosamund leant forward, and, reading the name, exclaimed—

"And pray, who is Ada Littlecot? Did you know her? Was the dog a present of yours to her? How long ago was it? Why did you never mention her name to me? Where is Ada Littlecot now? Is she married? When did you last see her?"

These questions were uttered in rapid succession, and a voice a little, a very little, raised. I said nothing; but giving the dog to one of the servants to take to Stoke, put my arm round Rosamund's waist, and drawing her into the hall

again, said she was a foolish little thing, and must not mind such trifles. I had known the dog and its mistress also, in bygone times. The dog was an old favourite of mine. As for Miss Littlecot, I really did not know what had become of her. How should I?

Rosamund broke from me indignantly.

“Do you think me a child—an idiot? Do you suppose I am to be soothed and won over by gracious smiles, or amiable glances? You mistake me, sir. I have been neglected—ill-used—cruelly trifled with! Let go my hand, sir!”

She snatched up the little wounded greyhound, and rushed to the door; there she paused a moment, her bosom heaving with emotion, and her eyes gleaming at me like two angry stars. Then she clasped the dog closer in her arms, and disappeared abruptly. I thought it wiser to let her have her way for the present.

Rosamund had not left the room long when the servant brought me a large pile of bills connected with the election, which Apwood had sent for me to look over. I was glad of something to do, and taking the papers into the library, sat down at the

table, and commenced examining them. The election expenses had made a serious inroad into the amount paid to my credit by the Messrs. Harp. Well, it could not be helped. Next election I trusted might be uncontested. The bills must be paid; it was no use groaning over them. I pushed them from me and, tired and worried, leaned back in my arm-chair with closed eyes.

Presently the library door gently opened, and a cup of tea was placed on the table before me. I did not open my eyes, thinking it was David. A voice said, in tones of mock solemnity,—

“Will your highness condescend to take a slice of bread and butter?”

It was my wife, radiant with smiles, as if nothing had happened. She said it was all right now; 'twas that tiresome Winifred's fault; she had taken a wrong path, and so missed her altogether. Not that Rosamund wished to excuse herself—not at all; she had been frightfully cross. She was sorry for it. Adding,—

“But we must make it up. The moon is rising over the elms; there is time after all for a last walk over Glenarvon hill.”

We took a pleasant stroll along the winding paths leading up the hill, bathed in the pale light of the crescent moon. On reaching the summit, we noticed at no great distance two figures disappear round one of the clumps of trees.

“Two of the servants, I suppose,” said Rosamund. “They are glad, poor things, to escape out of that stifling servants’ hall !”

I thought little of it. We walked on, and after a while turned back towards the house.

Not far from the flower-terrace, half way down the hill, was a small summer-house, with roof of thatch, and walls lined with moss, overrun with jessamine and honeysuckle in full bloom. Inside was a rustic bench. From this spot could be seen a wide expanse of country. The landscape was beautiful even by moonlight. Out of a motionless sea of white mist rose the distant hills in dark fantastic forms, their undulating summits here and there gleaming in the moonbeams, whilst the masses of wood, abundantly breaking forth above the now invisible fields, resembled a countless group of islets. We paused by common consent, and entered the summer-house to gaze upon the scene. Here a circumstance

occurred that gave a disagreeable turn to our ideas. The rustic bench was occupied by two persons, a man and woman, seated side by side, quite at their ease, as if they had as much right to be there as ourselves. The moon at that instant sent a bright ray over the trees in the field below, illuminating the interior of the summer-house. One of the figures was Winifred: who the man was, I did not at the first moment detect. They had remained quiet, in the hope of our passing by the summer-house without noticing them. But who was Winifred's companion?

I approached the bench. Winifred instantly sprang forwards, and addressing herself to Rosamund as well as myself, began to utter with much volubility a string of apologies in the usual fashion. The night was so lovely. The house was so warm and close. It was such a blessing to taste a little fresh air.

But who was the man? He took off his hat and bowed. I recognized in the moonlight the swarthy, but handsome, countenance of Alphonse, Sir Hugh's French valet.

I have never been very severe with servants on the delicate subject of "followers" and sweet-

hearts. Under certain restrictions, I do not see why those who wait upon us should not be allowed the same liberties as ourselves.

But that my wife's lady's-maid, a young and handsome girl, should be allowed to take moonlight walks unknown to her mistress, with such a man as Alphonse, was a thing not to be tolerated for a moment.

I spoke to her sharply, and gave her a month's warning on the spot. As for Alphonse I used even less ceremony. We were not far from the gamekeeper's cottage, and, perceiving a light in the window, I called to the keeper. He was just starting on his rounds, and answered my summons immediately.

"See this man safe out of my grounds," I said, "and if he shows his face here again, send for the parish constable. Now then," I added, turning to Alphonse, "walk off, sir, as fast as you please!"

Alphonse scowled at me in silent wrath, turned on his heel, and walked slowly away, followed by my keeper, who kept his gun at full-cock and eyed him cautiously, as if he were a vicious animal hostile to hares and pheasants. Alphonse,

however, had not gone far when he paused abruptly, and, turning round, exclaimed,—

“Bah! Monsieur Chauncey, you are von great man here, very great man! But *moi, je suis gentilhomme aussi bien que vous, et mon père était baron! Oui, baron!* Bah! I despise you vid all my heart!” He followed up these remarks with elaborate gestures of contempt and aversion.

The keeper gently touched him on the shoulder to intimate the propriety of moving on. Alphonse started back as if he had been stung by a hornet; he brandished his right hand, and I noticed he held something that glittered in the moonlight. Shouting to my man to beware of the knife, I hastened towards him, Rosamund trying to hold me back. Winifred had at first contented herself with the popular feminine expedient of crying bitterly, but now seeing mischief was on foot, she ran to Alphonse, and in the twinkling of an eye wrested the knife from his hand, and threw it into the bushes.

Alphonse was for the moment furious, but perceiving pretty plainly that we were “masters of the situation,” he reluctantly turned away, and walked off at a rapid pace.

There was of course a scene with Winifred when we reached home. Rosamund thought I had been rather hard upon her, and I was inclined to agree with her. Perhaps the quickness and courage with which she had disarmed Monsieur Alphonse at a critical moment favourably impressed me, but be that as it may, my resolution speedily melted. I gave Winifred a lecture on the impropriety of moonlight walks with foreigners of dubious character, and for this once agreed to overlook her fault and allow her to remain.

It appeared she had made his acquaintance when in Lady Annandale's service, and at one time they had gone so far as to talk of marriage; but that was at an end: they had in fact met that very night to bid each other farewell for good, wishing to part friends. The man was immediately going abroad with Sir Hugh Littlecot, and was not likely to trouble us again.

Next morning we started for London.

CHAPTER V.

RECOLLECTIONS OF A RETIRED M.P.

MY first experience of parliamentary life resembled no doubt that of hundreds of other M.P.'s. The House of Commons was very different to what I expected. As a mere looker-on, the life would have been pleasant enough. An exciting debate warms the blood, and gratifies the intellect more than any other entertainment. The tussle of mind with mind, the weighty fact, the adroit allusion, the humorous thrust, the cruel sneer—all this is interesting. Then if the debate is dull, the M.P. can read in the library, gossip in the lobbies, smoke in the smoking-room, or, if happily independent of whippers-in, can turn his back on St. Stephen, and placidly diverge for the night into the mazes of fashionable life, either with or without "a pair."

But I had entered Parliament as a working man, and not merely a looker-on. The question was how to begin? With much good sense, as I conceived, I determined to do nothing for some months, but watch and learn the ways of the House. This was very well in theory, but in practice my self-command failed. Doing nothing began to be a slow torture. I became depressed and almost ill; I felt I must do something, and accordingly did it as follows.

After all my abstemiousness, I rose with much deliberation to make a speech, carefully rehearsed for some hours previous, at exactly two in the morning, when the House was impatient to get to bed. The debate had been driven late into the night by discussion on other subjects, and I had had no chance of speaking earlier. The wise course would have been to have said nothing and waited for another opportunity. But, lacking experience, and deficient as yet in the gift of self-restraint, nowhere more useful than in the House, I sprang on my legs as if plucked from my seat by some invisible wire from the ceiling. The shout of "Divide" that rang through the House rather stimulated me than otherwise. I hoped to excite

the interest and compel the attention of both sides. There were a few cries of "New member, new member!" Reluctantly the House let me go on. Near me I heard one M.P. say to another, "Who's that confounded fellow?" with as much coolness as if I were a stray porter or policeman, instead of Mr. Herbert Chauncey, county member, lately come into a handsome fortune, who had distinguished himself at college, and of whom great things were expected by his friends.

On the Treasury bench a noble lord said in an audible voice, "Why the deuce does the fool get up to speak at two in the morning?" All this time I was getting through my opening sentences; my idea having all along been to make a neat speech of some half an hour's duration, rather to excite expectation than to achieve a high reputation as a debater.

But before I had got through my first paragraph, the House began to comprehend that I was commencing, not a few remarks, but a studied oration. Some of the men immediately grew restless, and once more there was a loud murmur of "Divide." This was not encouraging, but what was worse, the idea crept through my mind, unwelcome as a

twinge of toothache, that I was perpetrating a great blunder. I was making myself a bore, and when a man has established a character for being a bore, he is often a long time in getting rid of it. If I had possessed impudence, I might have run through my speech as fast as a schoolboy saying his task; but impudence was not one of my gifts, and the only idea that occurred to me was to make a dignified retreat; that is to say, judiciously curtail my speech, and sit down in ten minutes.

More easily said than done. As soon as I left the beaten track of my well-conned harangue, I began to flounder in "abyssmal" mud. The cry of "Divide" again burst forth, and the tone in which it was uttered was unmistakable; it meant—"Oh, shut up that bothering noise and sit down: nobody wants to hear you!" This did not improve the clearness of my ideas, but I struggled through my sentence, and began another with, "Mr. Speaker!" There was no need whatever to exclaim "Mr. Speaker;" and I said to myself—"You are saying that to gain time, for you know you haven't a notion what to say next." The moment I made this pertinent observation, my mind became a blank; there was an

awful pause ; the very cries of " Divide " ceased. I gazed wildly at the Speaker ; he looked at me with benignant compassion, as if replying—" I am sorry for you, but you see I can't help you." I believe the pause was only five seconds and a quarter in duration, but in my intense distress it seemed many minutes. The whole building began slowly to revolve round and round, my heart was nailed to my ribs, and my tongue as dry as a piece of shoe-leather. I made a desperate effort, like a drowning man, to save myself, and partially succeeded. There were a few good-natured " Hear, hears," by way of encouragement, but that did me no good ; it only impressed upon my mind the disagreeable fact that my embarrassment was patent to everybody. I saved myself, as I said, by a desperate effort ; condensing into a couple of sentences the pith of my half-hour's oration, I wound up by assuring the House I would not detain it at that late hour. This was the only sentiment in my speech that met with applause, and I sank back into my place in a frame of mind not far from miserable.

As I had overrated my powers of enchaining

the attention of the House, much more did I overrate the extent of my failure. In point of fact very few suspected it was a failure at all, for none could know I had privately contemplated making a decided "hit." But more particularly, in common with most of us, I imagined myself the observed of all observers, when I was barely observed by a dozen near me.

Leaving the House with an aching heart, I threw myself into a cab, and went home to bed "a blighted being." Next morning, however, my spirits a little revived. My five minutes' speech did not look so very bad in print. One man called it "sensible." I could have clasped him to my heart, though only the day before such gentle praise would have seemed downright impertinent.

But my unlucky attempt to make a sensation left some ill effects behind. I was vastly more nervous than I was before. Merely to present a petition, became a most formidable proceeding—a glass of sherry and a biscuit were essential before the step could be attempted. For weeks, nay months, I would no more have addressed "Mr. Speaker," except in the department of parliamentary business just mentioned, than have danced

a hornpipe on the floor of the House. One day, however, in Committee of the whole House, some member made a foolish observation; I rose, on the impulse of the moment, and put him right; there was laughter and applause. A weight seemed taken from my mind, and nerve and self-possession came back to me. By degrees I gained the ear of the House, and political leaders deemed my support worth securing.

Parties were, at that date, very evenly balanced; the Opposition well organized, and knit together as one man; the Ministerialists composed of heterogeneous materials, barely strong enough to retain office. Every individual vote was, therefore, of vital importance to them.

As for myself, though returned to Parliament as a Tory, I had stipulated for a certain liberty of action. Sitting below the gangway on the Opposition benches, I usually, but not always, voted with my party. As long as the motions on which I voted were unimportant, this independent conduct did not give offence; members of Parliament are permitted by domineering constituents and despotic whippers-in, to amuse themselves by voting against their party on trumpery measures,

provided they obey orders on those of importance. You may succumb to the dictates of conscience on some twopenny-halfpenny item in the estimates, but must meekly swallow your convictions, and hasten into the right lobby, on a vote affecting the best interests of the country.

In due time a juncture arrived, proving the truth of what has been just said. Notice was given by a member of the Whig Government, of an intended measure of some moment. The Opposition, as eager to gain "place" as the Ministerialists to keep it, took counsel on the measure; and, finding it not very well received by the country, resolved to oppose it at every stage. In my humble judgment, the Government measure was a good one, and I could not make up my mind to vote against it.

Now, the moment it was rumoured at White's and in the lobbies of the House, that "Chauncey was going wrong," I was beset by underlings of all sorts and sizes, to induce me to "stick to my party."

Slimesbury, the Opposition whip, pervaded me like a pertinacious gnat, or thirsty fly. His voice was constantly buzzing in my ear, both at the

House and at the Clubs. He was now earnest, now jocose; severely remonstrant, yet unmistakably complimentary.

“Chauncey, as a man of the world, I need not tell you—” “Chauncey, as a rising man, you ought not to throw away a fine position.” “Chauncey, it is a sad thing to see your remarkable talents going to the dogs.” “Chauncey, excuse my saying so, but a man of talent cannot play the fool with impunity,” &c. &c.

I listened: and, though I suspected the man was laughing in his sleeve all the while, felt my vanity soothed and gratified. Yet I could not resolve to vote against the Government Bill. No; I would remain neuter; that was the utmost point to which I could strain my conscience.

Other influence was, however, brought to bear not merely upon myself but also upon my wife.

We were asked to some of the great gatherings at the West End—Lord and Lady Spetchley’s amongst others. His lordship was one of the Opposition leaders. He took Rosamund in to dinner, under pretence that she was a bride, though there were two peeresses and at least seven honourable Mrs. Somebodies present. The peeresses took the

thing good-humouredly; the seven honourables were rather put out; especially two, who were decidedly plebeian in appearance, and had a secret misgiving that they were so. Seated by Lord Spetchley, Rosamund was treated with conspicuous devotion all dinner-time. His lordship was first charmingly entertaining — full of anecdote, brimming over with innocent yet racy gossip; then he became sentimental. His dark eyes grew moist as he confessed to Rosamund, in a voice modulated to a whisper, that “he was a man whom no one entirely understood; he was doomed to walk through life in a moral solitude; he had never in the course of a varied existence known a heart entirely congenial to his own.” Poor Rosamund was almost crying from sympathy, but rallied very much when his lordship, overhearing a conversation carried on near him between a much-respected millionaire and a literary bishop, struck in with a facetious sally, that drew tears of merriment from the bishop’s eyes, and crumpled up the millionaire’s countenance “like a wet cloth ill-laid up.” She thought his lordship could not be so very bad after all, and felt her mind much easier.

As for myself, I sat between a young married lady and a gentleman; the former pretty and agreeable, the latter courteous and judicious; I say judicious, because his whole aim seemed to be to supply myself and my charming neighbour with pleasant topics of conversation whenever we were inclined to flag. Before dinner was over, I began to regard him as a sort of benignant philanthropist, who went into society simply to promote the happiness of his kind. He only spoke when there was a pause in our conversation, and having dropped a remark that started us off once more, modestly abstained from further interference until wanted again. Afterwards he turned out to be Lord Spetchley's private secretary, and I suppose was only discharging his special vocation.

We stayed a few minutes in the drawing-room after coffee, and Lord Spetchley was pleased to be very kind and friendly to me. He did not touch upon the coming debate, although it must have been uppermost in his thoughts. He had too much good taste to allude to it.

His lordship took me aside into a deeply-recessed window, and asked my opinion, very seriously, on

the Meadshire Turnpike Trusts' Amendment Act? It was a matter, he said, which had lately engaged much of his thoughts. I was quite struck at the familiarity with all the bearings of this question evinced by his lordship; he seemed quite at home in it. Then he inquired whether I had ever seen his collection of autographs of remarkable men in the reign of Henry VIII. I answered in the negative, and he promised to send the volume to me tomorrow, to look over at my leisure. His lordship then descanted with some energy on the state of our colonial dependencies, and lamented that, in the event of a change of ministry, he could not lay his finger upon one old experienced M.P. who was fit for the post of Under Secretary for the Colonies. "We must have new blood, Chauncey—we must indeed. There will be a terrible outcry amongst the old stagers, but my mind is made up; new blood I want, and new blood I will have!"

So saying, his lordship shook me warmly by the hand, and I led Rosamund off, both of us quite elated with the attentions paid us. Lady Spetchley had pressed Rosamund to come regularly to her weekly receptions, and had thrown out, in an airy

whisper, how for some days past she had been using every exertion to get both of us an invitation to the approaching ball at Buckingham Palace.

Next day Lord Spetchley passed us in Rotten Row, but owing, as I presumed at the time, to his snort-sightedness, never saw us; otherwise I should have taken the opportunity of reminding him that the collection of autographs had never reached me.

Rosamund was a little disappointed; for Lord Spetchley had proposed to have a long chat with her on metaphysics the very next time she went out riding. I believe, in her heart, she imagined his lordship thought me *de trop*, and therefore avoided us. But the real fact was that Lord Spetchley had totally forgotten for the moment that there were any such persons in the world as Mr. and Mrs. Herbert Chauncey, of Glenarvon, Meadshire, and 99, Chester Street, London.

As the time approached when the debate on the first reading of the Bill to which I have referred, was to come off, my mind became more and more engrossed with the subject. I went over the arguments *pro* and *con*, I ransacked the Athenæum library for works of reference, I pored

over Blue Books, and studied back numbers of Hansard's Debates so assiduously that inexperienced gentlemen from the provinces concluded I was insanely endeavouring to read the work right through, from beginning to end. At White's, I was perpetually falling headlong into an argument on the subject. One afternoon, I became entangled amongst a bevy of Tory M.P.'s, lunching at the Club. The argument waxed warm; I had no one to back me, but Eustace Pole, then in town. Eustace always sided with the minority, but unluckily stammered worse than ever; this rather impaired his efficiency as an ally. A noble lord, with a very stiff back, member for an agricultural county, shook his fist in my face, though, to do him justice, he immediately apologized for the indiscretion. Slimesbury took another tack, and, putting his mouth close to my ear, plied me, in a wheedling sort of way, with plausible suggestions, *sotto voce*, whenever there was a momentary lull in the storm. Suddenly, an aged Tory M.P., dressed in the style of George the Third's reign, and universally respected by our side, was taken poorly from excitement, and had to be driven home in Eustace

Pole's cab. The circle of disputants broke up abruptly, casting upon me looks of unequivocal horror and disgust as the guilty cause of the old man's sudden illness, and left me to the reproaches of an uneasy conscience. I walked out of White's with the secret resolution of never showing my face there again, until the Bill, about which all this disturbance arose, should be safely disposed of.

I am referring to days long past. In modern times, I suppose, pure patriotism and high political principle form the rule and not the exception. Of that, an old man, like myself, living in great seclusion, cannot pretend to be a judge.

CHAPTER VI.

THE TWO PORTRAITS.

THE day for the first reading of the Government Bill had been often fixed, and as often postponed; at length, however, the battle was positively to come off. The day previous, I rose early, in order to write out, at my leisure, the leading arguments that induced me to remain neutral. Breakfast was brought to me in my study. Soon afterwards, Rosamund appeared at the door with the morning paper; it was her self-imposed task to look it over before bringing it to me, and mark with a pencil all articles, or even paragraphs, that she thought would be either useful or interesting to me. Without raising my eyes from the paper on which I was writing, I thanked her almost mechanically; reminding her, at the same time,

that she had promised to look out an article I wished to refer to in the *Edinburgh Review*. Something in the tone of her voice aroused my attention ; I looked up, and perceived she was pale, harassed, and care-worn.

To my affectionate inquiries, Rosamund only replied with a smile, and a hasty pressure of the hand. She tried to make light of it. It was fatigue—it was yesterday's ride—it was Mrs. Languedoc's ball—it was the morning concert at the Belguards—it was of no consequence ; she would write out the passages I wanted—it would do her good. This, however, I could not allow, and, after some more discussion, she consented to lie down a little and rest, whilst I, for my part, agreed to postpone further work until the evening, and take a ride in Hyde Park before the heat of the day set in.

Whether it was that my mind had been overworked, and kept too long on the strain, or from some other cause, I know not, but Rosamund's pallor of countenance, and uneasiness of manner, troubled me beyond what there seemed any occasion for. I felt a thrill of pain to be thus reminded that, beloved as she was, no earthly power could

shield her from the sorrows and pains of mortal life. Adore her as I might, and devoted as might be my zeal and watchfulness, invisible enemies hovered round her frail form, and, as soon as the hour was come, nothing could resist or repel them.

Meditating in this way, I reached the park, and galloped fast over the turf, as if to leave my thoughts behind me. On reaching a somewhat sequestered road—for in those days the park was less public than now—I drew rein, and, allowing my horse to walk, fell to musing once more on the same subject. Then, as is often the case when we are depressed by some chance grief or anxiety, my thoughts glided over the course of my past life, pausing with disagreeable perverseness on those parts of it most burdensome to my memory and my conscience. Especially did the recollection of that last agitating interview with old Sir Hugh Littlecot challenge and arrest my attention.

The road, where I was slowly riding at a foot's pace, was, as already observed, somewhat secluded. The roar of the great city was softened to a dull murmur, and I could hear the wind

rustling the leaves of some large elms under which I was passing. I thought of Sir Hugh's looks of scorn, and words of bitter wrath; I remembered the stifled sobs and screams that caught my ear as I traversed the passage, filling me with confusion and distress.

At this moment, two persons emerged from behind some bushes, a short distance in front, and pursued a path that crossed the road at right angles. My attention was instantly riveted upon them. One was a man, advanced in years, but erect in figure, speaking apparently in a low voice, but with singular energy of manner. That man was Sir Hugh Littlecot.

It was not without emotion that I regarded him. The change in his appearance was great. Sir Hugh's face was ashy pale, and furrowed with wrinkles; the white eyebrows were knitted together over eyes glittering with mental excitement and fixed unswervingly upon those of his companion. I instinctively paused on recognizing him. He passed without seeing me, absorbed in the subject of his discourse, and still gesticulating with vehemence. I now watched him more at my ease, but a pang of alarm passed through

me as I noticed the dark costume in which he was attired. It was deep mourning for some near relation—wife, sister, daughter. Daughter! My heart sank at the thought, and I was about to urge my horse forwards, when, casting another glance at the figures of the two men, now retiring in the distance, I perceived that Sir Hugh's companion was some one not unknown to me. He was enveloped in a large, loose cloak, but surely I could not be mistaken?—it was certainly Apwood. The circumstance puzzled me. What possible reason could there be for their meeting? Well, it was no affair of mine. Apwood was not exclusively my man of business. He was accustomed to occupy his leisure time in behalf of such gentlemen as made it worth his while.

But what had brought Apwood to town? And why not have called at my house? These, however, were matters of small import. The question that chiefly engaged my thoughts was this:—for whom was Sir Hugh Littlecot in mourning?

I turned my horse's head homewards. Rosamund was still lying down in her room, and I walked to the Athenæum. There, procuring a file of back numbers of the *Morning Post* and

Court Journal, I anxiously turned over the pages. Sir Hugh had taken his daughter abroad in the expectation of re-establishing her health. I knew the immediate cause of her illness, but had heard little of their movements since ; and had shrunk from making inquiries. Trusting her illness was not serious, I had been able to put the subject on one side, and give myself up to my parliamentary duties without serious distraction.

Now, as I turned over the pages of the *Post*, the haggard countenance of the old man, and those dark ominous garments, haunted and disturbed my mind more and more.

The first allusion to the Littlecots that met my eye was, however, reassuring. There was a short notice of their return from Italy, followed up with the intimation that a marriage between Miss Littlecot and a certain foreign prince was on the *tapis*. Strangely incongruous was the next paragraph I discovered relating to them. It was as follows :—

“ We learn with much regret—a regret in which a large circle of the *beau monde* will sincerely participate—that the balmy atmosphere of the Eternal City has not conferred that greatest

of blessings—health—upon the lovely and interesting daughter of Sir Hugh Littlecot, Bart.”

Again, in a number of the *Court Journal*, I read the following passages in a letter of the correspondent of that paper at Rome, which gave me great uneasiness :—

“It is marvellous how our good countrymen hasten hither in the hope of finding relief for all possible evils, bodily and mental. Old men, verging on dotage ; young girls, pining for some faithless adorer ; dilapidated men of fashion, with shaky nerves, and shipwrecked fortunes ; consumptive patients, drawing a last mouthful or two of fresh air through the gauze of a respirator. Oh ! ’tis very sad, I assure you. Poor creatures, whose shrouds are already woven, with limbs aching from a hurried journey, are handed over to a *cicerone*, and dragged from ruin to ruin, from church to church, from gallery to gallery ; playing the antiquary over the grave of empires, whilst their own grave is yawning for them ; purchasing cameos and mosaics, alas, not for themselves, but for their heirs-at-law ; exploring the ruins of Titus’s Baths, or the Cæsars’ Palace, themselves the most conspicuous ruins of all !

Such a case I saw the other day, not six weeks since. A young girl, with a sweet, pale face, and eyes of softest blue, evidently fading away, hour by hour, from this sublunary scene. She had been, so the story ran, cruelly deceived and abandoned, or, to use a homely phrase, ‘jilted,’ by one of your men of *ton*. Her family is high-born and wealthy. I saw her driven to the studio of our first artist here, to sit for her portrait. She went more than once. But her illness took a severe turn, and thereupon Signor A—— condescended to wait upon her at her father’s lodging. The portrait is, I believe, only a miniature, but has been extravagantly cried up by the few who have obtained a glimpse. ’Tis said to resemble Guido’s Beatrice Cenci—supposing the Cenci to be at death’s door. It is a strange whim of the old man, her father. This is one case amongst others that greatly struck me. I must now conclude my sheet of gossip, for post-time is near.”

Men not merely of a sensitive conscience and active imagination, but of some power of metaphysical analysis, suffer far more acutely than the world at large is able to understand, after the

perpetration either of a crime, or of a blunder that bears a resemblance to it. Unable longer to endure the suspense, I threw aside the papers, and issued forth into the air.

I determined to go to Sir Hugh's house in Grosvenor Square, and ascertain the worst at once.

Whatever might have happened, one thing I knew and felt—I could not wish the past undone. Rosamund and myself had been happy together, were happy now. We loved each other tenderly. True, we had made the usual discovery that neither of us was perfect; yet, as a mother often dotes on the most froward of her children, so it is sometimes in love. Rare and fleeting manifestations of waywardness or impatience only endeared Rosamund the more to me. Her faults were those of a proud, noble, generous nature. Had she been free from them, my heart would have been saddened and oppressed by a sense of inferiority. We loved each other, and were happy. I could not wish the past undone; for, after all, whatever my enemies might say, had not my intentions with respect to Ada and her father been pure, straightforward, and conscientious?

Thus wrapped in thought, I reached Grosvenor

Square, and stood before Sir Hugh Littlecot's house. It presented a dreary and desolate aspect. Even from the outside I could discern slight tokens of neglect. The window-curtains hung in disordered folds; the flowers in the balcony, withering in the summer air, needed the fostering hand that once so carefully tended them; one of the jalousies was unfastened, and flapped to and fro in the wind, with a melancholy sound.

I collected my thoughts, and rang the bell. The door was opened by a man whose face was now familiar to me: a swarthy, handsome foreigner, of short stature, but light and active figure. It was Alphonse. I remembered that Sir Hugh had taken him back into his service.

The moment I recognized him, my mind misgave me; he looked worn out with fatigue and anxiety. Neither of us spoke for a few seconds. I mentioned the words "Miss Littlecot," in a tone of faltering inquiry.

"*Elle est morte!*" replied Alphonse, in harsh, vehement accents, and slammed the door violently in my face.

I stood motionless outside, almost stupified by sorrow. The shock was severer than I had an-

ticipated ; instead of departing as I had intended, another idea seized me. I again rang ; the door was again opened, but not by Alphonse.

Deeply distressed and humbled by the intelligence just heard, touched with pity for the old, bereaved father, stung with new remorse for the faithlessness of which I had been guilty, I yearned to grasp Sir Hugh's hand in mine, assure him of my heartfelt sorrow, my unfeigned repentance, my overflowing sympathy. Yes ; I could almost have implored forgiveness on my knees, so great appeared the calamity of which I had been the unwilling cause—so overwhelming the injury I had inflicted. I must see Sir Hugh. I must utter my grief, even though he spurn me from him, as if I were the meanest of culprits.

The servant admitted me, and showed me into Sir Hugh's private room, on the right hand. As the door closed upon me, I discerned, at the end of the passage, in the dull, imperfect light, Alphonse gazing after me.

Sir Hugh was expected home in half an hour. The door of the room was shut upon me, and I had leisure to look round. On the wall opposite hung two small oil paintings that instantly

attracted my attention. One I knew well; it was a beautiful portrait of Ada Littlecot, as I had known her in happier days. The other, I thought at first was that of a stranger—the pale, emaciated face of a young woman, whose eyes were faint with the languor of approaching death. It was painfully true to nature; yet a certain tenderness of expression, a gleam of ideal beauty, saved it from being positively ghastly and horrible. It was a work of undeniable genius. The features of that wan countenance were exquisitely delicate and lovely; the yellow hair fell in damp folds over the wasted arm on which her head lay helplessly. A white veil had been apparently bound round her temples, but had fallen farther back, and afforded a striking contrast to the dead, colourless hue of the face emerging from it. The eyes gazed drearily, as if upon some painful, though, to us, invisible object.

I was fascinated by that skilful impersonation of youth and loveliness, palsied and laid prostrate by the cold touch of death, and examined it with a shuddering interest. I turned to the other portrait—Ada's soft, warm countenance smiling gently on me. The crimson life shone on her

cheek; her clear eyes sparkled with the excitement of a sudden, but pleasant surprise; the full, yet delicate lips were slightly parted, as if she were about to speak; there was a glow of amber on her long and glossy hair. The flowers held in her hand were half crushed in the grasp of her slender fingers, as if forgotten in that moment of sweet agitation.

The contrast between the two pictures was fearful, almost solemn. What was that dismal portrait? Why was it placed side by side with Ada's? A few moments' closer attention enabled me to answer the question. Both were portraits of Ada Littlecot—Ada in her beauty and her joy—Ada on her bed of death.

I sat down on a chair opposite for a moment, greatly disturbed, and gazing, as if spell-bound, on those painfully contrasted pictures. Before my strained and anxious eyes they seemed to hover to and fro, then blend confusedly in one, until the sweet countenance of Ada, as I once knew her, appeared to wither into gaunt disease, stiffen into the rigidity of death, moulder into the ghastly corruption of the tomb. It was very horrible. With an effort I withdrew my eyes, and looked

round the apartment. Little was changed. The low chair and work-table, belonging to Ada, stood in the accustomed place. The bookcase, with her favourite books, her portfolio of drawings, and materials for painting, all were arranged precisely as of old. One change I noticed—Sir Hugh's writing-table and chair had been shifted, as if to command a view of those two portraits on the opposite wall.

It seemed as though that room was specially dedicated to the memory of Ada's undeserved sorrows and untimely death. There was something dreadful in thus feasting upon the miserable reminiscences of the past—thus cruelly and wilfully probing a wound, that should have been gently soothed, and gradually healed.

I asked myself the question—To what purpose is my visit here? What can I do to mitigate the old man's anguish—I, who am myself the author of it? Is he in a state of mind to derive the smallest comfort from my sympathy, however sincere—my prayers for forgiveness, however earnest? Rather would my presence be deemed an offensive and impudent intrusion.

The spectacle of that room, and the indications

of such intense, and, if I may so express myself, such fierce and stubborn grief, subdued and almost alarmed me. I ought not to wait his return. No; it would work evil rather than good for him and myself.

With these feelings I sat down at the writing-table, and hastily wrote a few lines to Sir Hugh. In language that flowed from the heart, I expressed my sorrow and contrition, intimated my wish to see him, and trusted to do so when time, and the consolations of religion, had somewhat assuaged his misery. What I wrote, I wrote from the heart, but doubtless with much precipitation. I left the house, and hastened home.

CHAPTER VII.

AN IMPORTANT STEP.

THE House of Commons was crammed in every part; the galleries were lined with members unable to obtain seats in the body of the House. I watched my opportunity, and was so fortunate as to secure a seat vacated by a stout gentleman, who was always taken ill if he did not dine punctually at six.

Slimesbury sat near me, and plied me with coaxing little observations, and adroit innuendoes, designed to put my mind in a proper frame.

“A fine seat is Meadshire—a very fine seat. Long may you enjoy it, my dear Chauncey. But you will excuse me for saying so, your seat will be shaky if you don’t stick more closely to your party. A thousand pities it is when a young man like you is bitten with the ‘independent’

crotchet! Many a noble career has been smashed by that foolish freak! Now listen. There is Padroon; he is 'opening the ball.' A great man, sir, though he is a Whig. He has no crotchets, not the ghost of one! D'ye think he is ever troubled with a twinge of conscience? No, sir, he is too much of a man for that. By the by, 'tis the common talk at White's that you are to be Under Secretary of the Colonies, if we come in. My dear fellow, you need not look so solemn: I don't say this to influence you; I know you better; the way to reach you is through the intellect. That's what the men were saying in the lobby just now—that's what I heard Spetchley say only yesterday. Influence you! I wish we could; the country would be the better for it, and the Whigs would walk out. But 'tis no use talking. Just keep my place whilst I get a sandwich."

Weary of his chat, I neither kept his place nor my own, but made a dash at a bench above, and listened to the debate. What I heard, only strengthened my disinclination to follow my party into the division lobby.

Whilst thus employed, a card was passed up

to me from the door-keeper. Upon it was the name of Apwood, with a few words in pencil asking for five minutes' interview. Rather against my will, I gave up my seat, and went out to him. He had something of importance to say to me; it was nothing connected with Glenarvon; it was wholly political. We adjourned to the library.

I mentioned my having noticed him in the park the day before. Apwood immediately declared I was mistaken—he had only arrived in town that very day. Not being of a suspicious temper, I concluded I had been deceived by some accidental resemblance.

Apwood was in possession of information relating to the Bill before the House, which he thought would interest me. The firm, with which he was connected before settling at Glenarvon, did a good deal of parliamentary business. Last year Beckington, one of the leaders of the Opposition, instructed the firm to employ counsel to draw a Bill he intended to lay before Parliament; it was corrected by Beckington himself. In that Bill was a clause, embodying the identical principle in the Bill now under debate, which had excited such a storm of virtuous indignation in

the ranks of the Opposition. Apwood produced Beckington's Bill from his pocket; it had been privately printed, but suppressed by Beckington before more than two or three copies had been distributed, and those only to immediate friends. Beckington's initials were at the foot of the last page. I was certainly surprised and disgusted at the effrontery he and his friends were displaying.

Apwood, perceiving the effect he had produced, said,—

“This is, of course, a communication of a delicate nature, and you must avail yourself of it with caution. But the thing is no secret on our side of the House; it will leak out sooner or later; I have therefore the less hesitation in putting you in possession of it. It is little I can do in the political world, but that little I do with a willing mind.”

I remained in the library for half an hour or so, studying the clauses of Beckington's Bill.

On returning to the House with my mind more than ever resolved not to oppose Government, I found a shoal of “small fry,” speaking during the dinner-hour to please constituents, or astonish

relations in the provinces. I sat it out patiently, and by and by the House, that had greatly thinned, became brimful. Beckington rose soon afterwards. There was a hush of expectation. The man was a lawyer, skilful in debate, not over-cautious in assertion, heedless whom he hit.

Slimesbury, who had again contrived to get a seat not far from me, tried to catch my eye more than once, as if to ascertain how much I was impressed. Able as the speech was, it only confirmed me more and more in my original opinion; he urged little I had not anticipated, and his burst of patriotic horror at the unconstitutional tendency of the Bill perfectly disgusted me. Almost foaming at the mouth with the violence of his indignation, he shook his fist at the Treasury bench as if he were denouncing the iniquities of a row of Norfolk Island convicts.

Indignant at Beckington's effrontery, I rose, and by unusual good fortune was called by the Speaker. My determination was taken; I should support the Government Bill. No sooner was the drift of my argument apprehended, than thunders of applause greeted me from the Ministerial benches. Regardless of the angry and contemptuous glances

of my own party, I proceeded to examine Beckington's elaborate reasoning, and to turn the edge of his invective. Interruptions became more frequent from the Opposition benches, but cheers from the other side, on the whole, predominated. In the excitement of the moment, I spoke more contemptuously of Beckington's affected patriotism than was perhaps becoming in a comparatively new member; I ridiculed his political prudery, and said it resembled the morbid modesty of the Yankee lady who put the legs of her pianoforte into trousers. Beckington had been very great on the subject of consistency; it was, he said, the noblest characteristic of a model statesman. I replied that the honourable gentleman was not that "model statesman" himself; he had exhibited a variety of posture on the parliamentary arena, that reminded me not so much of a model statesman as of a tumbler at a village fair.

There were indignant interruptions from Beckington's friends, and for a few moments I was unable to proceed. My temper was a little roused; I reiterated the charge of inconsistency, and not only touched upon one or two glaring instances of it in the honourable gentleman's career, but alluded

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to the Bill of which he had given notice last session, and expressed my regret that it had not been laid upon the table of the House, to be compared with the rival Bill of the Government. I was convinced that honourable members would derive both instruction and amusement from contrasting the one with the other, clause by clause, and sentence by sentence; I was equally convinced, however, after the speech I had just listened to, that honourable members would never have the opportunity afforded them.

The instant this allusion to the Bill escaped me, Beckington's countenance changed. Hitherto he had been lounging in his place, chatting with an air of contemptuous indifference, first with one man, then another, and strumming a tune with his fingers on the top of his hat, which was placed on his knees. When I mentioned the Bill, pointing my hand as I did so to Beckington, a flush of anger and surprise spread over his face. He hastily put on his hat and pulled it over his eyebrows. I saw, and the House saw too, that I had given him a home-thrust. After a few more words in reference to this abortive Bill that never had seen the light, and that never

would see the light—the honourable gentleman best knew why—I dropped personalities and went into the merits of the question before the House.

My speech certainly told. I spoke with evident sincerity, and my arguments were heard with attention, even by the Opposition; I was loudly cheered on sitting down. As soon as I was in the lobby, some of the Government men congratulated me on my success; Lord Padroon himself, in his pleasant, easy style, was good enough to compliment me. Black looks were cast at me by many of my own party, but opinions were divided as to the amount of criminality attaching to me. The younger and more independent members rather backed me up. They were not irrecoverably drenched in party spirit; they ventured at times to think for themselves, and did not consider that conscience should invariably be sacrificed to party interests. The debate was adjourned, and the House rising soon afterwards, the members poured forth into Palace Yard, some rushing to and fro in search of cabs, some walking homewards singly, or arm-in-arm. It was two o'clock in the morning, but the heavens being overcast, it was pitch dark. Heated by the ex-

attentions. My wife received an invitation to the King's ball. It was impossible to refuse it, though well I knew that it was obtained through ministerial influence, and was, in point of fact, a thank-offering to myself. I did not tell this to Rosamund, as it would have spoilt her pleasure. She enjoyed herself much, and in the innocence of her heart imagined she had been selected for this honour by royalty, from motives of the purest benevolence and most discriminating courtesy.

But when invitations came from Lord Padroon and others of the Ministry, I made a stand, and declined them one after the other with the virtuous austerity of an ancient Roman. It would never do to compromise my character for disinterestedness. I must reject these blandishments, and hold on my course, looking neither to the right hand nor to the left—a satisfied conscience my only reward.

Nevertheless, somehow or other, Mr. and Mrs. Herbert Chauncey were entangled in the soft meshes of the snare spread for them, as hundreds have been before and will be again.

CHAPTER VIII.

CAPTAIN ESHER, R.N.

ONE morning Rosamund met me at breakfast with an enthusiastic description of a delightful party at the Belguards' the evening before. She had been introduced to *such* a sweet creature, Lady Arabella Browne. Lady Arabella Browne said this—Lady Arabella Browne said that. Lady Arabella Browne was so gentle, so soothing, so confiding.

“Lady Arabella Browne sat by me at dinner,” continued Rosamund; “she listened to me with such an intelligent expression of countenance, it was a pleasure to talk to her. I don't think I was ever before so nearly being entertaining. I told several anecdotes—most of them a little stale—Lady Arabella was charmed. I was led on to give her some of my early reminis-

cences ; she was deeply interested. I quoted Shelley once ; she begged me to repeat the passage twice over. She not only talked herself, but drew me out so pleasantly. Upstairs, she took both my hands in hers, saying she was determined we should be fast friends. We are to call each other by our Christian names. Lady Arabella made me promise to go down to Richmond with her next Saturday, and bring you with me. Oh, don't shake your head, sir ! Wait till you see her ; I defy you to resist her ; the most fascinating person I ever met in my life ! Not very young—no. But so ingenuous, so unsophisticated, so natural ! ”

By the time breakfast was over, my mind was pretty well made up on two points :—first, that I was heartily tired of Lady Arabella Browne ; and, secondly, that Lady Arabella Browne was “doing the civil” at the word of command of somebody behind the scenes. Lady Arabella was the wife of Blaytant Browne, a junior lord of the Admiralty. Decidedly, I thought her less unsophisticated than she wished to appear.

My wife laughed at me, and called me sceptical, suspicious, unfeeling, and I know not what be-

sides. She looked forward to the party at Richmond so eagerly that I had not the heart to oppose her wishes. The pale, careworn look still hung about her, and made me often anxious; Lady Arabella's blandishments revived her spirits, and, at all events, could do neither of us any harm. On Saturday, then, it was arranged that Rosamund should join the party to Richmond, under the auspices of Lady Arabella Browne.

Before Saturday came, however, we were enlivened by an unexpected visitor. Captain Esher had stolen away from B——, for a few days' recreation in town. His consular duties at B—— were not very laborious, and a *locum tenens* was easily found.

How my good father-in-law ever became a consul used at first to puzzle me; though, to be sure, stranger appointments were made in those days. One day, however, the captain, recounting his professional misfortunes, of which, in common with most sailors, he had a pretty long list, told me the whole story. It arose simply out of a freak of patronage. What Esher wanted was a ship. He would rather have had the command of a ship for

one year, and then gone to the bottom, ship and all, than have lived to the good old age of eighty, in the long white house, with bright green shutters, in the upper town of B——, quietly drawing his salary of British consul, and doing very little to earn it. But ships were scarce, and young De Guerekin, nephew to the First Lord on the mother's side, having been appointed to the *Phrenzy*, 74, Esher, who had been promised that ship two years before, was abruptly offered the consulship at B——. Heartsick from hope deferred, and straitened in means, Captain Esher made up his mind in a hurry, accepted the appointment, went to B——, and made himself as comfortable as he could. He married a French lady, who bore him one child, Rosamund, and for some years he was very happy. But things had changed since then. First, he had lost his wife—a great sorrow; now, his daughter, by her marriage to me. True, she was married well; but it left him very solitary. As for good little Miss Cossett, his half-sister, she was better than nothing, but wholly unsuited to the captain as a companion. So the captain was apt to fret a little, and seriously question whether he had not made a

mistake in accepting the consulship ; of course forgetting that had it not been for the consulship he never would have been at B——, would have had no happy years of married life, no daughter Rosamund to cheer him by her letters and occasional visits. As for ever again commanding a ship, that was a dream only indulged in when particularly hopeful. In calm moments the notion seemed absurd.

The captain's visit was opportune, and did Rosamund much good. She took him all over London, showing the sights as if he were an intelligent schoolboy, and she herself an experienced *habituée* of the great city. Her father had not been in England for years. It would be divulging the state of the captain's finances in an indelicate manner to say why, but it is sufficient to hint that creditors are disagreeable people to encounter. Thanks to Rosamund and myself, the captain had now no fear of them, and he stalked through the streets, or rolled along in our open carriage, with a look of joyous defiance gleaming from his blue eyes.

It was quite affecting to witness how the father and daughter were imposed upon by shopmen,

cabmen, boxkeepers, and other harpies of civilized life. At the National Gallery, Esher, on trying to go upstairs, had a violent quarrel with a respectable individual in black, who insisted on relieving him of his heavy walking-stick. Esher took him for a pickpocket, but was horror-struck on discovering his error, and presented the respectable individual with no end of loose silver—a peace-offering accepted in the best and most forgiving spirit. At the Colosseum, Esher accidentally walked into the lake of Geneva, and thrust his stick through the top of Mont Blanc. At the Zoological Gardens his coat-tails became entangled in the elephant's trunk, and he was temporarily robbed of his hat by the dromedary. His delight at the clown at Astley's circus was such, that I once or twice thought of sending for a couple of able-bodied attendants to hold him while he laughed. In Rotten Row it was with difficulty we could prevent his pointing his walking-stick in convulsive admiration at each girl who galloped by. He distinguished himself at the Monument, but failed in ascending St. Paul's, owing to a slight misunderstanding with one of the officials, who disgusted him by an exorbitant

demand for fees. At the Tower, I gathered by his respectful manner and lowered voice that he took the beefeaters for veritable survivors of the court of Queen Elizabeth, and seriously doubted whether John of Gaunt might not, if he thought fit, walk out into the middle of the room and challenge the spectators to single combat. The services at Westminster Abbey delighted him; he went there every day, until, owing to an oversight of a verger, he was shut up for six mortal hours, and liberated by a chorister in a state of mind bordering on acute mania.

The second day of the captain's arrival we had rather a disagreeable scene between him and Apwood. The latter still remained in town, having a client who wanted his advice from day to day on a matter of importance. Our good captain was fixed at the window, staring at the passers-by—a favourite habit of his. On a sudden, he cried out,—

“Why, Rosie dear, here comes Harry Apwood! Hadn't a notion he was in London. Shall be glad to see him, though, for poor old Jeffry's sake.”

Whilst Rosamund had left the room for a

minute, and Apwood was knocking at the front door, I asked the captain what he meant.

He leaned his chin on the handle of his thick stick, and fixing his eyes on me, laughed out a loud, joyous laugh.

“Why, Herbert Chauncey, did ye never hear of Miss Lucy Apwood? She was Harry’s sister; he’s as like her as he can stare, only he has the least taste of a squint. Cousin Jeffry was very sweet upon her. But then, what’s the good of prying into the past? Poor fellow, he’s dead and gone! *De mortuis nil nisi bonum!* As for her, she knew what she was about! Oh, yes; I should think so. But hush, Chauncey, hush!”

This admonition was more needed by him than me, seeing that I was silent, and that the captain’s manly voice was reverberating from the top of the house to the bottom.

“Ah, Apwood, my lad, how are you? Give us your hand. How wags the world with you? Merrily, I’ll swear! Harry Apwood lights on his legs wherever he falls! Come, one more. Another shake of the hand, Harry!”

I did not think Apwood at all pleased to meet the captain, but after a few minutes he became

pretty cordial. 'Then Rosamund came in and talked about her model cottages at Glenarvon; Apwood produced the plans; Esher criticized them freely; they were too good by half. He jokingly put in a claim for one of them, as a sort of almshouse where he might lay his bones.

Apwood had a few words with me about politics. He begged me to be careful not to divulge how I procured my information respecting Beckington, and the obnoxious clause in the Bill, and soon afterwards he took leave.

Esher, always polite, insisted on showing him downstairs, though Apwood knew the way much better than he did. Scarcely had they had time to get to the front door, when I heard the captain's voice raised in vehement indignation; it pealed through the house like an organ. Rosamund darted out of the room to see what was the matter; presently she returned, leading her father with one hand, and with the other caressing his cheek, hot and crimson with wrath.

"The low-minded villain, but it is just what I might have expected. Rosie, he is a poor creature, and I was a fool to encourage him."

He sank into a chair exhausted. I inquired

what was the matter, and learnt that our friend Apwood, finding himself alone for a few seconds with the captain, had improved the occasion by gently representing the comfort that would accrue to him, if he took the opportunity of paying a little sum of twenty-five pounds sterling due to Apwood. Esher was disgusted. He nearly kicked Apwood there and then, but compromised the matter by requesting him to consider the operation performed.

“Only think: just when I had run over to England for a little recreation! Under my own daughter’s roof, too! It was downright profanity!”

We pacified him by degrees, but for the rest of his visit Apwood kept out of the way.

When Lady Arabella Browne found out that Rosamund’s father was with us, she insisted on his accompanying the party to Richmond. For myself I had rather have stayed away, but it would have vexed Rosamund; besides, Captain Esher needed some one to look after him.

We drove down some thirty or forty in number, and, notwithstanding the dust and the hot sun, and an accident with one of the carriages which

delayed us half an hour at Hammersmith, it was a pleasant excursion enough.

In the park at Richmond, I found myself, by some means or other, *tête-à-tête* with Lady Arabella. Expecting to find her artfully insidious and gracefully cajoling, I was agreeably disappointed; she was exceedingly frank and ingenuous. Turning her eyes upon me with a pleasant smile, she said:—

“ You are afraid of me, I can see; of course you are. It cannot be helped. But let us be open and honest for once. It is easier to be so—is it not? under these fine old elms, and on the cool, grassy sward, than at Almack’s or Devonshire House? I dare say you think I am a horribly artful creature, bent upon winning you over to us, *coûte que coûte*. Now, don’t you? Well, will you be very much shocked if I admit the fact? Of course I do: it is my bounden duty to make you one of us, if I can. After all you have done for Government, what is it but common gratitude to be civil to you? That you will agree to. But I go further—we must try and put you quite at your ease in your new position; we must smoothe your path, and make everything com-

fortable for you. You see, I have no concealments with you—it would be useless. If you were Lord Caper, with his retreating forehead, and chin like a bird's, it might be different. If you were Colonel Praunce yonder, imbedded in his huge beard like an owl in an ivy bush, I might try a little amiable diplomacy with you. But 'I know you too well, to trifle with you in that way. By and by you will be a politician of note—you will be somebody in the House; not quite yet, but all in good time."

I tried not to look a little disappointed, but, do what I would, the vanity of a young man shone through my heightened colour and forced smile.

"I told you I would be frank," she continued, "and I am so. My foible is making people happy, but when I esteem a person I always speak right out. By and by you will be somebody; at present, though promising, you are quite new to the House; almost—excuse me for saying so—raw. Yes, that is the expression I think. We have, however, great hopes of you; Canning's first few months in the House was very like yours. I am afraid I shall seem to flatter, so I will add

no more ; only do not rest content with what you have done ; never be satisfied, never rest, always press onwards. Ah, there is your dear Rosamund, condescending to listen to Praunce ! It is a comfort that his extremely silly remarks seldom get farther than his beard—it is a great non-conductor of sound. What a sweet creature your Rosamund is ! We are such friends ; I am quite foolish about her. Don't laugh at me ; but, living amongst an ever-shifting multitude of men and women hid in masks, your dear, honest, pure-minded Rosamund is like a breath of fresh, balmy air to a culprit in a stifling dungeon ! ”

By the time we had finished our walk in the park, I felt in a sort of gentle mesmeric trance. I do not know whether I believed all Lady Arabella said ; but believe or not, I was soothed and gratified. I suppose most men would have been so too. She was scarcely young, but still very pretty and fascinating, and clever enough to make it satisfactory to know that she was at all events taking a good deal of trouble about me. My chief business was to listen ; I talked but little, and that cautiously. She heard me with an air of quiet interest, as if she knew that what I was say-

ing was well worth hearing, but that I was too thoroughly aware of it to need any fussy demonstration of enjoyment on her part.

At the dinner, Lady Arabella placed herself between Languedoc (of the Board of Control) and my father-in-law, Captain Esher. She seemed intensely diverted by the contrast between the two. One *blasé*, sceptical, sneering; the other, an unsophisticated sea-captain who had never been thoroughly tamed. Captain Esher was so lost in admiration for his fair neighbour that he ate nothing for a quarter of an hour; at length being peremptorily commanded to eat by Lady Arabella, he commenced consuming the side dishes, of which there were only about four dozen, as if he never meant to leave off, and I believe never would have left off, had not Lady Arabella, in a soft, but thrilling whisper, given him leave to pause.

After the ladies had retired, I took care to place myself near the captain, in case he should say or do something out of the common.

“What a bore eating is!” exclaimed a dark-looking man, who had published a poem. “How it disturbs the harmony of the features! Bad enough with men, but with women it is fatal.

The sweetest countenance becomes actually loathsome, when engaged in the work of mastication."

"I don't mind," said Eustace Pole, "if I am eating myself."

"I love women," interposed Languedoc, "in all possible predicaments; there is something artless and piquant in these little contortions of the countenance."

"Disgusting," rejoined the dark man. "What! do you like to see a woman yawn?"

"Decidedly," rejoined Languedoc; "most decidedly. A racy, original movement, or quaint convulsion, amuses and interests me. It stirs the softer feelings of my nature more forcibly than all the airs and graces women think so fascinating."

"Languedoc," exclaimed Eustace Pole, "I know a young girl who is troubled with St. Vitus's dance; I will send her up to town for your edification."

"Do so," said Languedoc; "the spectacle would afford me a vast deal more interest than that of a hackneyed woman of fashion. Look at Arabella Browne; I have known her twenty years, and I give you my word, that, barring a

wrinkle or two, she carries about the same absurd expression of face she did when she first made her *début* at Almack's. I wish it were possible to say something to astonish the little humbug; it would be really refreshing."

Captain Esher all this time had been listening in profound perplexity to the conversation, the meaning of which he was very much at a loss to understand. No sooner, however, did he hear the unceremonious allusion to Lady Arabella—a lady whom he had begun to regard with feelings of the most respectful devotion—than he gave the table one solemn, emphatic thump, rose abruptly, pushed back his chair, gazed round the room with an air of scornful defiance, and strode away, like an indignant lion.

I was rather uncomfortable, but luckily my father-in-law's excitement did not cause much sensation; a dispute between Caper and Colonel Praunce as to the age of some claret, at the moment divided the attention of the company. I observed Esher presently emerge in the garden, take out from his pocket a huge German pipe, and console himself by a solitary smoke.

We soon after joined the ladies in the garden.

There was tea, coffee, and singing. The Belguard girls sang delightfully. The moon shed its silvery lustre on the scene. We began to feel romantic, when the Bacchanalian uproar of an "Orphans' Home Society" dinner in the large room of the hotel, recalled us to the vulgar realities of life. Colonel Praunce was hailed from the window by a personal friend in an elated state, doing the charitable at the aforesaid dinner, who, to the colonel's infinite disgust, accosted him as, "Praunce, old fellow!" and threatened to join us. The charitable orgies, however, gradually died out, and we had a very pretty trio from Rosamund and the Belguards; Lord Caper tried to sing with them, and did not do much harm, as his voice, being feeble, was only heard once when he got a trifle out of tune. We began again to feel romantic; but a waiter now interrupted us, with a petition from the proprietor, that we would not make so much noise—there were fourteen families in the hotel, who liked early hours, and were utterly distracted by the singing. So, rather humiliated, we summoned our carriages, and made for home. Lady Arabella took off Captain

Esher in her carriage, and dropped him at our house. Praunce was to have come with us, but his friend of the "Orphans' Home Society" caught him outside the hotel, and, to avoid a scene, Praunce was fain to take a seat in his phaeton, and try a new batch of cigars.

Captain Esher remained with us nearly a fortnight. Much as I should have wished his visit prolonged, on my dear wife's account, it must be admitted he occasioned me no little trouble and anxiety. He was sociably inclined, and would promptly accept invitations by the dozen, from all sorts of persons, and regardless of previous engagements. I never felt quite comfortable whilst he was out of my sight; do what I would, he would get away sometimes, taking advantage of my absence at the House of Commons, and next day I should find he had been enjoying a "delightful evening" with the Blaytant Brownes, or some one else I did not wish to be intimate with.

Finally Esher took his departure, laden with gifts of all kinds, including a vicious Skye terrier, presented to him by Lady Arabella, who wished to get rid of the animal. The captain

regarded him with the tenderest affection, and gave him a daily airing in the park. Strictly speaking, it was the Skye terrier that gave the captain an airing; for, though the latter affected to lead the dog by a string, the dog was decidedly the master, and drew the captain whithersoever it seemed good to him. A handsome, hale old gentleman might, therefore, be seen in the park for an hour daily, engaged in the agreeable task of running after a dog of quarrelsome and inquisitive habits, sometimes amidst a crowd of frightened nursery-maids, sometimes entangled in a stream of carriages, to the peril of life or limb, sometimes in the thick of a general *mêlée* of dogs barking, snarling, or biting; the string, by which the dog was secured, strained to the utmost, and the captain tugging at it convulsively with flushed cheek and anxious eye.

We packed the animal in a hamper, and put it on board the steamer, as the only means of enabling the captain to make a start for B——.

CHAPTER IX.

THE ANONYMOUS LETTERS.

I WAS sorry to find my wife's anxious, unquiet look, that had almost disappeared during the last fortnight, gradually return after her father's departure. It was natural she should at first feel low; but the dejection of spirits would not pass away: something was evidently pressing on her mind. Perhaps my frequent absence from home, attending to my parliamentary duties, made her feel lonely and dull. Perhaps the late hours, and the bustle and glare of a town life, had begun to tell upon her health. When I questioned her, however, she invariably treated the matter lightly; I could not induce her to give a serious answer; she turned all I said into good-humoured ridicule, and laughed away my fears. But her merri-ment was not natural; it did not put my mind at ease, but rather the reverse.

Shortly before the day of the expected debate I was in the drawing-room with Rosamund. We were talking on a subject that usually gave her pleasure, and revived her spirits—our return to Glenarvon, now not far distant. We were interrupted by Winifred, who delivered a letter just received by post. It was addressed to Rosamund; no sooner did she notice the handwriting, than the colour that faintly tinged her cheek vanished; she slipped it into her writing-desk with the greatest haste, and without having broken the seal.

“Will you not let me read that letter, dearest?”

I spoke very gently, but also very seriously. To my surprise and sorrow, Rosamund leaned her head on my shoulder, and burst into a passionate flood of tears. Her sobs became almost hysterical, and, placing her on the sofa, I hastened out of the room for some stimulants. Winifred was in the anteroom, dusting china ornaments, and, sending her for what I required, I returned to Rosamund, and endeavoured to calm her sorrow. Almost inarticulate from emotion, she continued sobbing and crying, and every attempt to elicit

the cause of her distress, appeared to aggravate it. I thought it prudent, therefore, simply to prevail on her to drink the hartshorn and water, that Winifred had fetched for her.

Presently Rosamund became more calm, and, at my request, retired to lie down in her room for an hour or two.

It was a disagreeable and annoying incident. Clearly the cause of her agitation was in some way connected with the letter she had just received. I paced up and down the drawing-room, disquieted and unhappy. Passing the writing-desk, I carelessly touched it with my hand; it was open. Rosamund, in her hurry and trepidation, had not pressed down the cover sufficiently to catch the bolt of the lock. The occasion appeared to me so serious, as to justify a step naturally painful to me; it seemed to be my duty to examine the desk, and ascertain the contents of the letter, the mere handwriting of which had caused so much trouble and excitement. I sat down and thought the matter over.

Some men would not have hesitated for a moment to ransack the desk, and read every letter it contained; such a course was foreign to my

nature. I have ever held that husband and wife should treat each other, not alone with affection, but with strictest courtesy and consideration. It is childish to suppose there ought to be no secrets between man and wife; the fewer the better; but, unless the woman is a mere doll, or the man a soft-brained nonentity, it is impossible, in the nineteenth century, that there should be none at all. Nay, it is a question whether it is not our duty to refrain from speaking, when to speak involves injustice to the absent one, and fruitless anguish to the one whom we address. But there are times, when the finer feelings must be set at nought—there are emergencies, when even ordinary rules of morality cease to be applicable. For instance, in dealing with a lunatic we are not bound to speak the truth, if the truth will do himself or others harm; the reasoning faculty is disordered; he is not *en rapport* with us; we are free from any obligation to keep faith with him. Were he in his proper senses he would not wish us so to do; to him the true is false—the false is true.

My wife is delivered to my charge by Providence to watch over, cherish, and protect. If

bodily or spiritual danger envelop her, I, as the stronger—I, as the responsible guardian—must come to her rescue, unflinchingly and fearlessly.

Lifting the cover of the desk, I took out the letter; other letters in the same handwriting lay beneath it. I would not needlessly open a sealed letter; those she had already perused would equally serve my purpose. First, then, going to the door of my wife's room, and ascertaining from Winifred that she was quietly sleeping, I selected one of the letters and opened it. The handwriting appeared to be feigned; at all events, I did not recognize it. It began and ended abruptly; there was no signature: the date was previous to my visit to Sir Hugh Littlecot's.

“I have several times alluded to the young woman whom I saw dying by inches in Italy. I dare to say you have been considerably puzzled as to my motives in directing your attention to her sufferings. I am now going to be a little more communicative, so prepare to be interested. This young creature's mortal malady took its rise from a curious little incident. She was engaged to be married. The poor thing was tenderly attached

to her betrothed. His name I shall leave you to conjecture. He behaved rather unhand-somely; broke off the marriage, saying he had changed his mind! Was not that droll? But I will tell you something droller—the girl had not an iron constitution; it is not so common with women as with men. She was hurt by the conduct of her betrothed, fell into weak health, and ended by breaking a blood-vessel. Then all was down-hill with her; go where they would, do what they would, her friends could not mend her health. Enough for to-day. Now, mark! I have said it before, but some young ladies have weak memories, and I repeat it, if you breathe a hint of receiving these letters to any one, more especially to him whom I suppose I must call your best friend, ruin will fall upon him, and you, and all connected with you.”

Flushed with anger, I seized another letter of more recent date.

“Do you know, my dear young lady—has your best friend, or any one else, informed you—of an interesting circumstance? The young creature, whose lingering illness I have described to you, stage by stage, has been released. She died on

the 5th instant. Is any member of your household going to attend the funeral? I only ask from curiosity."

Who could the writer of these letters be but Sir Hugh Littlecot? It was a cruel, unmanly method of wreaking vengeance on me—thus to torture the heart of my innocent young wife. It betokened a meanness of spirit unworthy of Sir Hugh's proud, unbending nature. Yet what, after all, is meaner than revenge? What is it in most cases but the action of intense selfishness on some of the worst passions of man's heart?

With knitted brows and heaving breast I read other letters of similar import, designed to harass Rosamund with vague suspicions, and rob her of her peace of mind. Another passage attracted me:—

"When first I commenced this correspondence—for, although you cannot reply to me, I easily imagine the agreeable answers you would write to me, if you could—I did not, my dear young lady, feel a warm interest in your welfare. This reads strange: but I am a conscientious man, almost as conscientious as your best friend, and like to speak the truth. Well, I confess that at

first I did not take a warm interest in your welfare; I acted from a stern sense of duty, and not from the promptings of affection. By degrees, however, I have begun to soften towards you; your imaginary replies have touched me. I begin to affect you hugely, and watch over your daily life with a tenderness that positively verges on the maudlin. It is weak, is it not? But women like weakness, ay, and wickedness, too, when love for them is at the bottom of it. Now, I am going to prove the truth of what I say; so listen attentively. I have told you a few anecdotes of a certain person's early life at college and elsewhere. You liked them—did not you? How pleasant to reflect that he is leading so steady a life, all through your pure example and holy influence! Was not that in your poor little heart? But I am going to tell you something of later date. You remember a young person, with a sweet, lovely face—ay, as lovely as yours, every bit—with a will of her own;—there again she resembles you, does not she?—the young person, I mean, who engrossed your best friend's attention for a good hour, whilst you were waiting on the top of the hill—do you remember? She writes such

nice letters ; such good, religious, improving letters, you can't think. Has your best friend ever shown you any of them ? Perhaps he thinks 'twould be a breach of confidence : he is a very honourable man. Farewell for the present ; and remember—secrecy : or instantly the lighted match will be applied to the train, and then——”

It was true, that after Edith Vaughan's visit to Glenarvon, I had written her a letter relative to my engagement with her friend, Ada Littlecot ; it was a letter intended for her father's eye as well as for her own. I desired to place before two persons, whose good opinion I valued, a plain but full statement of the case, together with its extenuating circumstances. That letter had been answered by Edith ; but what she wrote expressed not so much her own sentiments, as those of her father, who, immersed in business, had no time to write himself. A letter or two had been exchanged, and then the correspondence ceased.

How it came to the knowledge of the anonymous writer of these cruel letters, I could not divine. To show Miss Vaughan's letter to Rosamund would have been impossible, without unripping

the whole history of my engagement, and its sudden termination.

What ought I now to do? My wife was the victim of an insidious and cruel persecution. There were two courses open to me,—either frankly and lovingly to tell her everything, not sparing myself, and acquaint her with the liberty I had taken, from the best motives, with her private letters; or else to let matters rest—untouched and unnoticed—until we had left town, and were free from the trammels of London life. On the whole, the latter seemed the wiser course. Retired in the country, we might discuss the whole subject at our ease, and even laugh at sorrows and anxieties that now seemed so serious. To tell her that I had read the letters—which the writer had warned her, under pain of heavy retribution, to keep secret—would at the present moment greatly augment her anxiety and alarm. In a few weeks the case would be different.

I determined to postpone all mention of the matter for the present, and, meantime, to make one more attempt to soften Sir Hugh's heart, and pacify his strange and irrational animosity;

for it did not seem to admit of doubt that the letters were either written or dictated by himself.

Replacing them in the desk, I quitted the room, and going to my study, wrote a letter to Sir Hugh, requesting an interview. It was not an easy or agreeable task, and I wrote several before I was satisfied; then, having ascertained that Rosamund was much better, and well enough, indeed, to keep an engagement to drink tea with the Blaytant Brownes, I went down to the House.

Sir Hugh Littlecot took no notice of my letter.

On the very day of the great debate, I was unluckily compelled to accompany some Meadshire gentlemen to the office of a solicitor in the city, on business connected with a private Bill, then before the House. Being my constituents, it was of course necessary to be civil to them. They came early to breakfast, bringing with them a hearty provincial appetite, and a budget of county news. There was no getting away from them. My conduct on the Government Bill had given offence. Not to themselves—oh, no, not at all. They were rather of my way of

thinking than otherwise. But to a great many of their friends and neighbours.

I have generally found that when an M.P. has given umbrage to his constituents, it has not been to the particular constituents who inform him of the fact, but to their friends and neighbours.

The guests, according to the approved model of gentlemen who have come up to talk to "our member," were respectful, yet patronizing; I could not, as I have said, get away from them. They stuck to me long after we had finished business with the solicitor. I carried them home to a late lunch. The provincial appetite was again conspicuous, and the county news served up again in a more spicy style, under the influence of my best sherry. At length, rendered desperate by the knowledge that four o'clock was fast approaching, and with it an important debate in which I might have to take part, I suddenly sprang up, looked up at my watch, and my countenance becoming "a tablet of unutterable thought," anxiously murmured the words, "parliamentary duties." The gentlemen were impressed. "Our member's" valuable time must not be trespassed upon. They gradually, but not without one or

two false starts, and agonizing little delays, evaporated from the house.

I rushed to my study, and plunged into the notes and memoranda of my speech. The debate was not expected to begin till seven or eight o'clock. Rosamund was at a concert: we had not met since the morning. I would take some tea, and meanwhile she would be home again. I had scarcely sat down to my tea, when I was interrupted.

A cab pulled up at the door; there was a furious rap, and the next moment Colonel Saltz, the Government whip, rushed into my room, without waiting for the servant to announce him.

"Chauncey, you are wanted instantly at the House! The Bill is on, and Languedoc has been up an hour; Beckington is taking notes—he is sure to follow. Don't lose a moment, but jump into my cab and come to the House, there's a good fellow! We have no one who can tackle Beckington like yourself."

I was at first annoyed at this uncereemonious summons. Saltz saw it, and immediately altered his tone. The ministers had been taken a little

by surprise. They had expected McGuilp's motion on the Tweed Fisheries would have come on and taken up the whole evening. But McGuilp, from treachery or stupidity, had suddenly dropped his motion, and the all-important Bill came on instantly. There was no help for it—none. It was a great crisis; a national crisis.

“And you see, my dear Chauncey, we look to you as our mainstay and sheet-anchor; we do indeed! Excuse my vehemence, but there is not a moment to lose. ‘The cause of Government is the cause of justice!’ those were your own words, were they not?”

I could not refuse to accompany him, and we sallied forth.

At the moment I was about to spring into the carriage, a lean and skinny hand was suddenly placed on my arm, and a shrill voice, which I too well knew, rang in my ear. It was Ferris, who was either accidentally passing that way, or had meditated a late call.

“Ah, my dear cousin,” he exclaimed, “I am glad to see you well and cheery—well and cheery! It must have been a trying day.”

“How so, sir?” I replied, rather impatiently.

“Oh, those vile newspapers! Scurrilous abuse showered upon you by all the Opposition prints save one! Infamous, libellous! I positively blush for human nature, I do indeed!”

“Nonsense!” interposed Saltz. “Who cares for the newspapers? We might stand here all night to listen to all the lies of the Tory press. Come; in with you, Chauncey!”

“True, true,” persisted Ferris, standing between me and the carriage; “perfectly true. ’Twould take me all night to repeat the abominable charges against our distinguished friend in the *Morning Messenger*;—true, true!”

The whipper-in lost patience, and pushing him on one side, almost forced me into the carriage. Ferris tried to thrust a copy of the *Messenger* into my hand, but failing to do so, grinned encouragingly, waved his hand affectionately, and ambled down the street as if he had been discharging an important duty with credit to himself and satisfaction to the public.

“These are some of the inconveniences of parliamentary success,” said Saltz, in a careless tone of voice, as, drawing my arm in his, he

hastened through the lobbies : “you will get used to ‘it. But don’t let it make you too vain. Abuse has turned many an old stager’s head, I assure you. Praise palls upon the palate ; abuse is always racy. It veils so much sweeter a compliment.”

It might be so. But I confess I felt a little anxious to know what the *Morning Messenger* had to say against me. The reception I met with from some members, well known to me, lounging in the lobby, annoyed and surprised me. One or two abruptly turned their backs upon me. Of the others, a few responded to my usual greeting with courtesy, but all regarded me with looks of coldness and aversion.

It was true, that in the particular measure before the House I had taken a line of my own ; but hitherto, with the exception of the Opposition leaders and some of their immediate followers, I had been treated with unabated respect and cordiality. Now, for some reason or other, there was a change of feeling towards me.

The House was full, and I could only find a place on the Ministerialist side below the gangway. Beckington was up, and, after a while,

diverged from the line of argument he was pursuing, to direct upon me a volley of ungenerous and bitter sarcasm. Beckington insinuated, in covert, but intelligible terms, that I had abandoned my party from interested motives. Touching lightly upon the imputations on his own consistency that had fallen from me in the debate on the first reading, he said that he was ready to stand by his public political actions. As for paltry slanders, based upon information picked up behind the scenes, for which no doubt a handsome price had been paid or promised, he would not condescend to notice them. Men of all parties knew what they were worth.

Indignant to be thus unjustly belied, I rose to reply as early in the evening as possible, but it was some time before the Speaker would call my name; it seemed almost as if he too participated in the spirit of hostility evoked against me. At length, I caught his eye, and addressed the House; but my reception was discouraging. The regular Ministerialists cheered mechanically as if by word of command. The Opposition interrupted and harassed me by contemptuous uproar, or loud ironical applause. Still I per-

severed, and at length began to make progress.

When, however, I alluded to Beckington's gross reflections upon my political honour, and, with the energy of conscious integrity, protested that neither, directly or indirectly, myself or any of my friends had benefited, or hoped to benefit, in the smallest degree from the support I had rendered to the Ministry, a scene occurred, which I am not likely to forget. A shout of discordant groans, and insulting "Hear, hears," burst from the Opposition benches, mingled with derisive laughter. Even on the other side of the House, what I said seemed to make an unfavourable impression. Raising my voice, I reiterated my statement, and in loud and passionate accents, appealed to the House for justice and fair play. Amidst the tumult, my words were imperfectly heard. A friendly voice near me—it was Languedoc's—advised me not to swim against the current, but to wait for another opportunity.

I took the hint, and presently sat down. For some minutes, my hat well over my eyes, I sat, burning with indignation, and meditating I know

not what measures of vengeance on my calumniator. My thoughts were, however, diverted by a note hastily scribbled in pencil, passed to me from Languedoc. It was simply one line:—"Have you read to-day's newspapers?" The question was suggestive, and I immediately rose and left the House. The newspaper room was too public: I would go to my club, and examine the papers of the day quietly and deliberately.

The newspapers were spread out on a side table in the library, and fortunately I had the room to myself. I turned my attention to the Opposition journals: almost the first paragraph that met my eye was this:—

"We understand that Captain Henry Esher will be appointed to the command of the *Argus*, 80. The gallant captain is father of Mrs. Herbert Chauncey, lady of the member for Meadshire, and he has been for many years Consul at B——, in France."

The bitterest comments on the appointment appeared in other parts of the paper. Greatly distressed, my first impulse was to hasten home and interrogate my wife. Was it possible she had compromised my honour by applying to Blaytant

Browne on her father's behalf, through her new friend, Lady Arabella?

A sort of fascination, however, attracted my attention to the newspapers before me. I took them up one after the other. Captain Esher's appointment was, of course, the subject of vehement animadversion. But this was not all. The whole history of the election contest was ripped open, and my character defamed by charges and insinuations, alike savage and cowardly.

Abuse without a solid substratum of fact is powerless to crush a man, even though all the journals of the day open fire upon him simultaneously. But in my case, facts, however exaggerated, were not wholly absent.

My adventure with Hartley, "whose coffin had been my stepping-stone to Parliament." The coroner's inquest, "where, by a happy mixture of bullying and cajolery, the country bumpkins of the locality were persuaded to whitewash my damaged character!" The election for the county, "with its offensive and humiliating details, affording malignant joy to the enemies of our noble constitution." The spectacle of my wife—"A lady of Amazonian instincts, leading the dragoons to

the charge, and instigating the magistrates to launch armed men upon a misguided, ignorant, defenceless multitude!" The arrest of Vaughan at a critical moment—"The dirtiest manœuvre ever recorded in the annals of electioneering villany!" The correspondence with Messrs. Quickset and Harp respecting the letter "so conveniently mislaid when wanted, so mysteriously recovered when no longer of any use!"

These, and other topics equally insulting and calumnious, formed the staple of leading articles and letters from anonymous correspondents, in the Opposition prints, clinched by the deliberate accusation, that, to provide snug berths for friends and relatives, I had abandoned my party and enlisted in the ranks of a Government whose principles I had publicly denounced, and whose measures I had solemnly pledged myself to oppose. "Mr. Herbert Chauncey" was held up to execration not merely as a sordid place-hunter, but as a man tainted in all the relations of life, "whose only refuge from public scorn was in solitude and obscurity."

I could read no more, but hastened home with all speed. Unjust and cruel as these slanders

were, Captain Esher's appointment wounded me far more deeply. In comparison with that damaging fact, all else was trivial and insignificant.

To my vexation, Rosamund was out for the evening. I returned to the House of Commons, in the hope of gaining private information from the Government. The House was up. The doorkeepers lingering in the lobbies said the debate had been an angry one, and that Ministers were getting the worst of it.

In looking over the letters yesterday, I had noticed one, in an official envelope, with the Admiralty seal. The handwriting of the direction was Blaytant Browne's, Lady Arabella's husband. The painful thought haunted me that this letter, addressed to Rosamund, had reference to Esher's appointment. I tried the desk, but it was now locked. Weary with exertion, I abandoned my intention of waiting up for Rosamund, and retired to rest.

CHAPTER X.

UNDER A CLOUD.

“HERBERT dear, it seems an age since I have seen you! Why do you not congratulate me on this delightful news? My dear father is appointed to a ship!”

Such were the words with which Rosamund greeted me next morning.

As usual when home late from the House, I had slept in my dressing-room, and this was our first meeting. My disturbed and anxious look instantly checked her. Half frightened, she sat down, and asked what ailed me.

“Rosamund, this is a serious matter. Your husband’s honour should be dearer to you than the worldly success of your father.”

Colouring deeply, she answered that I was severe and harsh; surely she was right to rejoice at her father’s merited promotion?

"Only think, Herbert, after long, long years he has obtained the wish of his heart. How can it affect your honour? It is not you who have asked Government to grant him this boon."

"Dearest," I replied, "forgive me for speaking plainly; the occasion requires it. *I* have never asked the Government, but have *you*? Do not be offended. A word, a look, a hint, may have given Lady Arabella the clue to your secret wishes."

Rosamund interrupted me almost haughtily.

"Herbert, I thought you knew me better. I thought you had a higher opinion of me. Never have I breathed a syllable on the subject to Lady Arabella or any one else. I know my duty better."

My mind was greatly perplexed. Yearning for consolation and support, I should have rejoiced to believe that in no way whatever was my wife responsible for what had happened; but doubts and fears beset me. Leaning my head upon my hand, I exclaimed,—

"Bear with me, Rosamund, bear with me. Speak to me gently and lovingly, for I am very unhappy."

The tears sprang to her eyes, and, sitting be-

side me on the sofa, she pressed my hand to her lips, and entreated me not to vex myself with groundless suspicions.

"But tell me, dearest," I continued, "had you no private information of what was contemplated? Did you hear from no one before the appointment was in the papers?"

"From no one!" exclaimed Rosamund. "I had not the remotest hint of the intentions of Government. Lady Arabella saw me last night, and congratulated me; but that was the first time she ever mentioned the subject. As for her husband, he has never written or spoken to me in his life."

I remembered the letter, with the Admiralty seal, addressed to her in Blaytant Browne's handwriting, and started with surprise when I heard her say this.

"Never written to you?" I said, without considering to what it would lead.

"Never in his life!" reiterated Rosamund. "Never in his life! But why did you look so strange? What makes you so mistrustful—so suspicious? I said he has never written to me, and I repeat it. What more do you want?"

She pressed me for an answer; at length I replied,—

“I thought I saw a letter addressed to you in his handwriting, but of course it must be a mistake. Say no more, dearest.”

“But I must and will know what you mean,” rejoined Rosamund, with increased warmth. “What letter? And when and where did you see it?”

Confused and annoyed, I hesitated for an instant, then endeavoured to turn it off; but Rosamund was not satisfied. She sprang up, hastened to her desk, unlocked it, and rapidly looked over the letters. Seizing the official letter, she examined it for a moment, then said, with some excitement of manner,—

“Herbert, you don’t mean this letter? surely you don’t mean this letter? Herbert, why do not you answer?”

I was embarrassed. My wife saw it, and threw the letter towards me, exclaiming,—

“Read it. It merely contained a note of Arabella’s. She stopped at the Admiralty to see her husband, and wrote a few hurried lines to me, which he put in the envelope, and directed

for her. I had forgotten it. Read it; it is merely an invitation. But how did you see this letter? I put it in my desk, with two or three other notes, directly after I received it."

She gazed at me with an expression of alarm not unmixed with displeasure. Had I been examining her desk? She had found it unlocked yesterday, and the contents disturbed. Could I have been so—she paused for a word—so interfering, as to open it, and meddle with her private letters and papers? Was it possible?

It was no longer in my power to exercise further reserve. I made her sit down by me, and frankly told her what I had done.

"Could I, dear Rosamund, loving you as I do with my whole heart, permit you to be persecuted by a cowardly foe, who dares not attack us openly? Was it not my duty, as your protector, friend, and husband, to endeavour to rescue you from his clutches?"

"Open my desk, Herbert! read my private letters! I am grieved beyond measure. I could not have believed it possible. Is this your confidence in me? this your unbounded affection? Oh, you have been cruel—cruel and insulting! You have

wronged me deeply. I shall never forget it—never!”

Tears wetted her flushed cheeks, and she walked to the farther end of the apartment.

In my grief and anxiety, I advanced towards her, exclaiming,—

“Rose, I acted for the best. You were suffering from a hidden sorrow, my wish was to succour and comfort you; but if I erred in opening those letters, I now, with earnestness and humility, ask you to forgive me. I have been punished enough. I have seen the face of my dearest friend look upon me harshly, unforgivingly. I am in great trouble, and the only being who can comfort me ceases to love—ceases even to pity me!”

She turned from me, but I could see that she was moved.

“Can it be,” I continued, “that the slanders of a wretch, who dares not sign his name, embitters your mind against me? Take those hateful letters in your hand, and question me on every point touched by my cowardly assailant. I will answer truthfully. You will learn that my only fault has been, loving you with a love that

engrossed all the faculties of my soul! Rose, can I humble myself more? From my heart I ask you to trust in my affection, and to grant me your pity and your love."

With streaming eyes she embraced me, saying—

"For your sake, for both our sakes, I kept those letters secret, and suffered in silence. Evil was threatened if I revealed them. Therefore, though harassed and tormented, I strove to repress my fears, and conceal my troubles. Once more at Glenarvon, in the free, beautiful country, I would have placed the letters in your hands, and asked for your sympathy and approval. As for lying slanders, raked up from the past, I despise them—I ask no questions; let them be. My trust in you has hitherto been steadfast; but now what shall I say? I love you tenderly, I will cleave to you through good and ill report, I will share your griefs; but my confidence cannot be what it was. Nay, dearest," she said, in answer to my looks and gestures of remonstrance, "ask your own heart: how can it be otherwise? The wound may heal, but not suddenly. Will not that content you?"

My eyes were full of tears; my heart heavy

with a grief that was new to me. It was in vain to reason with her further. Rosamund spoke kindly and soothingly; she entered into all my anxieties; she would aid me as far as lay in her power. Her father must resign his appointment; she would insist upon it.

I thought this an useless step; it would indicate a guilty conscience. The mischief, be it much or little, had been done already.

My only course was to take an early opportunity of making a personal explanation to the House, vindicating my character as a member of Parliament and a man of honour. I had denied, in answer to Beckington's sneers, that any one connected with me had profited from the services I had rendered to Government. But the statement, though as it chanced inaccurate, was *bonâ fide*; honestly could I declare that I had had no hand in the appointment of Captain Esher.

On looking over the notice paper, I perceived that the wished-for opportunity would be afforded me sooner than I had anticipated.

Slimesbury, my quondam friend and admirer, inspired with righteous indignation at my political

tergiversation, had a notice of motion for the ensuing week.

“To put a question to the First Lord of the Admiralty, respecting the appointment of Captain Esher to the command of H.M.S. *Argus*.”

This move on the part of my antagonists would enable me to put myself right with the House. Rosamund, meantime, must write to her father and ascertain what application had been made by him to the Ministry, and whether my name had been imprudently put forwards. Scarcely had I settled this point on my mind, when, at the bottom of the list of notices, I found one in Beckington's name, that greatly disturbed me.

“To draw the attention of the House to the appointment of Mr. Henry Apwood to the Deputy Clerkship of the Colonial Audit Office, and to inquire why the recommendation of the Select Committee, not to fill up the vacancy, had not been complied with.”

My difficulties appeared hourly to augment. Apwood's connection with myself was probably known, and grave apprehensions seized me that the appointment conferred upon him so unex-

pectedly, would be made a handle for fresh attacks upon me.

I at once wrote to Apwood, demanding explanations; then, hastening to the House, where there was a morning sitting, lost no time in obtaining an interview with Saltz in order to make arrangements for meeting Slimesbury's motion by a decisive and satisfactory explanation.

Saltz answered me in rather an offhand way.

"Take it easy, Chauncey, take it easy. To be sure, it's a nuisance the thing got wind. Padroon is very wroth about it. Somebody, we don't know who, has blabbed—that's plain. But Blaytant will deal with Slimesbury, and as for your friend Apwood's appointment, it was only talked of, and nothing was settled; so there's an answer to that. Only you must remain quiet. Let the matter blow over; the more you stir it, the more unpleasant you will make it; you had better lie by for the present."

I was quite of a different mind, and took a high tone. Esher's appointment was made wholly without my knowledge. I had not in the remotest degree supported his claims. Seeing I was warm on the subject, Saltz, taking me into the farthest

library, drew a paper from his pocket, and put it in my hands.

It was a statement of Esher's services which I had written out for him at his solicitation whilst he was staying at my house. The data were furnished by himself, in several fragmentary sheets of paper; I had collected them, and thrown them together in an intelligible shape. But, ever on my guard, I insisted upon his copying out my statement, and returning me the original; and at the same time seriously cautioned him against using my name in any application to Government at the present juncture.

I now remembered, as soon as I recognized the paper put in my hands, that it had disappeared from my writing-table, though to the best of my remembrance I had seen it there since Captain Esher's departure. The statement was signed by my initials; it was my habit to put my initials to anything I wrote, whether important or trivial.

"You see," quietly remarked Saltz, "it won't do for Blaytant to swear stoutly you had nothing whatever to do with Esher's application. This written statement was forwarded to Blaytant

Browne, enclosed in Esher's letter. The captain referred to your services to Government; he wrote from your house; you are his son-in-law; it was assumed you and he were pulling together. So you see, my good fellow, my advice is sound. Let the affair blow over; all will come right sooner or later; but don't make a fuss; don't try the 'heroics' with the House; it won't go down. Be cool, and brazen the thing out in a gentlemanly way."

The man's familiarity galled me. It was clear he thought me one of his own stamp, and considered my anxiety to justify my conduct mere humbug and hypocrisy; a few days ago he would not have dared to adopt such a tone towards me. I left him abruptly, to make, as I said, further inquiries. There was an ill-concealed sneer on his countenance as we parted.

Rosamund, meanwhile, hastened to her kind friend, Lady Arabella Browne. The interview was not so agreeable as usual. Straightforward and ingenuous, my wife was grieved to find that her friend had not been perfectly open with her. Lady Arabella had unquestionably encouraged Esher to press his claims on Government, un-

known to ourselves. Lady Arabella had told him it was not "etiquette" to consult me. If he did, Mr. Chauncey would be compromised. How the statement of his claims, written by myself, had been substituted for his own copy, could not be explained. At the time of my drawing it up, I had had no intimation that Esher intended to apply to Government.

We did not hear from Esher for some time. A letter of his crossed ours, from which it appeared that he was starting for Cork, where the *Argus* was lying, in a Government steamer that chanced to touch at B——.

From Apwood I heard immediately, and, at the time, thought his letter very satisfactory. He protested he had known nothing of the rumoured honour in store for him, until a few days ago, when a quasi-official letter reached him, sounding his inclinations on the subject. It was the work of well-meaning friends. He had no intention of accepting the appointment, even if definitively offered to him, which it had not yet been.

Unfortunately, it was no secret that some communication respecting the appointment had been made to Apwood. How the fact leaked out, no one

knew. There was a rumour of warm discussions having taken place in the Cabinet on this matter, as well as on Esher's appointment. It was certainly embarrassing to Government, as well as to myself, that Apwood, who was openly accused by the Tory press of supplying me with useful information respecting Beckington's Bill of last session, should be offered a valuable appointment. His refusal of it would be attributed to fear, or shame, or the influence of powerful friends. It was a bad business. My conscience, however, was at ease—my hands were clean. I looked forward with anxiety, but with confidence, to the day fixed both for Slimesbury's and Beckington's motions; but a circumstance occurred that threatened to monopolize the whole attention of the House.

The Government, alarmed for the success of the second reading of their Bill, suddenly announced their intention to abandon it. The step was a blunder. It was rightly construed as a signal of weakness and distress. The very same evening, Beckington, amidst enthusiastic Opposition cheering, gave notice of a motion of want of confidence.

Great excitement prevailed. The lobbies of the House, the clubs, the houses of political leaders on either side, rang with discussion on the approaching struggle. Rival meetings were held almost daily at Lord Padroon's, and Lord Spetchley's. Cabinet Councils sat almost *en permanence*. Trusty messengers scoured the country to bring up truant or refractory M.P.'s; letters, with the same object, were despatched, by post or private hand, to Paris, Wiesbaden, and elsewhere; not a vote could be spared on either side. Amidst the general excitement, my own personal question, though to myself of such precious interest, shrank into insignificance.

One afternoon, Colonel Saltz met me in the library of the Athenæum. His manner was once more respectful, almost obsequious.

"I think we shall lick them by a majority of twenty-five," he whispered, hoarsely, in my ear.

"You must not tell me your secrets," I said, slightly smiling. "I am not a Government man."

"Good heavens! you don't mean to say you are not going with us?"

"Certainly not," I rejoined, emphatically, and,

turning my back upon him, walked to the other end of the room.

He stood for some seconds transfixed with amazement and red with indignation; then vanished, slamming the door after him, to the great discomposure of seventeen elderly gentlemen, reading in various attitudes round the room.

From a worldly point of view, this frank avowal of my intentions was scarcely wise. To break irretrievably with the Ministry, was to shut up the only source from whence I could hope to derive assistance and support. But I was eager to show to the public, and to my former political friends, that my adherence to Government had been strictly contingent on the particular measure which they had now abandoned.

In the House the next evening, I learnt that the notice of motion respecting Captain Esher's appointment to the *Argus* had been postponed. Moreover, Beckington let me know, through a friend, that he should not go into the case of Apwood, until after the want of confidence motion had been disposed of. This intelligence greatly vexed me. It was essential to give a public

denial to the slanderous charges current against me in the daily papers; the fact, that immediately after my short interview with Saltz at the Athenæum, one or two of the Ministerial prints pelted me with stale "Opposition" calumnies, still further stimulated me to action.

Resolving to address the House next day, I sent word to Beckington and Slimesbury, and requested Languedoc to make the matter fully known on his side of the House.

Accordingly, on the usual question on Friday evening, that "the House should adjourn till Monday," I rose to make a personal statement necessary for the "vindication of my own character, as well as that of the House of which I was a member." My annoyance was great to find the House, after the first curiosity was satisfied, gradually thinning until barely forty members were present. It was known that Beckington and Slimesbury would reserve their reply until the motions of which they had given notice came on; every one was full of the "want of confidence" motion and the fate of the Ministry; my personal explanations were voted a "bore." It was, moreover, the fatal hour for dinner. Saltz

and Slimesbury took advantage of these circumstances, and coaxed members out of the House half a dozen at a time. Had it not been for Languedoc, Saltz would have put a man up to move that the House be counted; not, indeed, to get an actual "count out," but simply to vex and disconcert me. To address empty benches is always trying, and nowhere more so than in the House of Commons. At first, full of my subject and keenly anxious to make a favourable impression, I spoke with vigour and effect. There was a faint cheer at the close of my opening sentence, and Languedoc threw in a "Hear, hear," whenever he could, but the general silence, the distinctness with which I heard every casual noise, not merely in the House, but in the division lobbies, painfully depressed my spirits. The stream of my ideas began to freeze; I spoke slowly and mechanically; the sound of my own voice, rendered dry and "clapping" by the effort of speaking to an unsympathizing audience sparsely scattered about the House, struck with painful distinctness on my ear.

Nevertheless I struggled on, and glad was I when I uttered, with some degree of energy,

my concluding sentence, and sank into my place, cheered by Languedoc, and three M. Ps'. near him.

Beckington, in an easy, conversational tone of voice, said a few words. "The honourable member, in his highly creditable, but somewhat feverish anxiety to clear his character, had put 'the cart before the horse.'" It was Beckington's intention, and he had given due notice of it, to bring the subject formally before the House. When he did so, it would be in my power to meet what he should have to say in any way I thought best for my own interests. I was endeavouring to bias the House unfairly in my own favour; he begged honourable members to suspend their judgment until they had distinctly heard what the case really was. So saying, he sat down.

Slimesbury followed much in the same strain, and, in an oily tone of voice, commiserated the discomfort I must feel under the awkward imputations flung upon me from different quarters. He protested that it was real, friendly anxiety for my welfare that had impelled him to give notice of the motion standing in his name. "But," he added, "the honourable member must be pa-

tient, and not anticipate a discussion that would come on in due course." For my own sake he advised me—and here his voice became an affectionate whine—he entreated me "not to think that a verdict, hastily snatched from an ill-informed House, would be satisfactory to myself or to the country."

Languedoc, who behaved very well throughout, said a few words on my behalf. He had heard of an Oriental mode of torture in which the unhappy victim was methodically cut to pieces, losing one day a foot, the next a hand, the third day an arm, and so on. It was too much to expect that the honourable member for Meadshire should sit still, day after day, whilst gentlemen on the Opposition benches, aided by anonymous assailants in the public prints, put him to a kind of slow moral torture, and gradually made mincemeat of his reputation. The honourable member had a right—indeed, it was his duty—to insist upon the matter being investigated without delay; and Languedoc, for his part, was satisfied, after what had fallen from me, that the charges, or rather insinuations, brought against the honourable member had very little foundation in fact.

The matter then dropped. On the whole, I was glad that I had spoken. Anything was better than remaining passive; to be so, was to plead guilty. That my enemies were silenced, or the public wholly disabused, was far indeed from being the case. My speech was commented upon in half a dozen papers next day with malignant ingenuity.

The organs of the Government ceased to take my part; nay, as a general rule, vied with their political opponents in calumniating me.

CHAPTER XI.

A WELCOME VISITOR.

ONE more letter reached Rosamund from the anonymous correspondent. It ran thus:—

“The time has arrived, my dear young friend, when our correspondence must draw to a close. You will think of me sometimes, will not you? What I clearly prognosticated, will assuredly come to pass—every hour brings it nearer. There is but one opinion, through the length and breadth of society, as to your husband’s conduct; and, I think, in about a week from this time, unless some extraordinary circumstance interrupt the usual connection between cause and effect, you may reasonably expect to be outcasts from the pale of fashionable life. This will be only a prelude to other little difficulties on which I will not now touch. ‘Sufficient for the day;’ you

know the rest; or, if not, your worthy husband, a man of lively religious sentiments, will tell you. A word now on parliamentary matters. The honourable member for Meadshire will take cold comfort by his speech of to-night: how comical if there should be a 'count-out!' He is veering round again to the Tories, as I hear: this is prudent; every rat runs from a sinking ship. And the Ministry is sinking; there is a split in the Cabinet. Your husband had best make his peace with the Tories while he may. And now, from the bottom of my heart, I wish you both all the happiness you deserve."

The writer of this letter, whoever he might be, appeared well informed of what was passing in the inner circles of the political world. A day or two only had elapsed when the morning papers announced that serious differences of opinion had broken out in the Cabinet; Lord Padroon and Lord Annandale had had high words. The total collapse of the Ministry was by no means improbable.

It was at this juncture, that a disagreeable incident brought home to me, very closely, the change that had fallen upon my fortunes. We had issued

invitations, three weeks before, for a dinner-party on an extensive scale, embracing several of the political notabilities of the day. Considering, however, the bad feeling shown towards me in and out of the House of Commons, the question arose whether it would not be wiser to put off the party altogether. This was our first impulse, but on reflection, I thought such a step would savour of conscious guilt; it was better, however much against our inclination, to persevere with our dinner-party with quiet dignity and self-possession.

The morning of that day I went to Lincoln's Inn, to consult my solicitors; it was my intention to prosecute one or more of the publishers of the Opposition journals for libel. The work of examining insulting sneers and slanderous invective was tedious: I took a turn in Hyde Park, to refresh both mind and body.

Before I had proceeded far, my attention was roused by shouts and cries of alarm. Not far distant, several persons were running in one direction; carriages had stopped, and those inside looked forth in anxiety; a policeman was shouting and gesticulating. I presently discerned the cause of this excitement—a horse had thrown its

rider, and was running away. It was galloping towards me, and the man who had been thrown, his foot entangled in the stirrup, was dragged along the road, a mere struggling heap enveloped in clouds of dust. Perceiving that the animal was running away from sheer fright, I stepped into the middle of the road, and stood still with outstretched arms. The horse slackened his speed on approaching, then swerved to one side; I made a rush, caught hold of the reins, and, with the aid of the passers-by, extricated the rider's foot from the stirrup, and raised him from the ground.

There was soon a crowd round us. One wiped the dust from his face, a second untied his neckcloth, a third brought smelling salts and *eau de Cologne* from some ladies in a carriage near. Who was the unfortunate man?

It was my poor gossiping cousin, Ferris. Senseless at first, he gradually rallied, and, in a feeble voice, asked if he was badly hurt.

"Bless you, sir, you're all right, or you couldn't ask the question!" remarked a cabman, who formed one of the circle gathered round; and, touching his hat, informed me his cab was

close to the Park gates and the motion of it would do the gentleman "a sight of good!" It was some time before the old man was satisfied he had broken no bones, but, at length, followed by a procession of inquisitive or compassionate spectators, allowed himself to be half carried, half supported to the cab. As I was helping him he suddenly recognized who I was.

"Cousin Herbert! Cousin Herbert! Is it possible? This is kind. Forget and forgive. Well, well, you're a worthy man!" Grasping my hand, he was going on to say more, when faintness again seized him, and, lifting him into the cab without more ado, I directed the cabman to drive to Ferris's house. Here we carried him to a sofa in his bedroom, and sent for a surgeon. Miss Isabella Ferris no sooner found herself *tête-à-tête* with me in the drawing-room, than she went off into violent hysterics, adding not a little to the general confusion of the household. On hearing, however, a favourable report from the surgeon, she rallied, and became so absurdly grateful for the assistance rendered to her father that I almost wished she would relapse into hysterics.

She seized my hand, and kissing it with thea-

trical fervour, accosted me as the "saviour of her darling papa."

I could only assure her that I should have stopped the horse had the rider been a perfect stranger.

Her ideas then took another turn. She began to lament over the extraordinary behaviour of her father's horse; the animal was endeared to them by long associations; so sweet-tempered, that he would eat corn out of anybody's hand; so fond of quiet meditation, that it was always a difficult thing to make him leave the stable; the excitement of a London life must have affected his brain. In the midst, however, of these reflections a message came from Ferris. He was anxious to see me.

Entering his bedroom I found the old gentleman sitting in his arm-chair, wrapped in a limp dressing-gown, with his feet ensconced in a large pair of slippers. He insisted on rising, and, in answer to my inquiries, said, giving himself a shake as if to make sure,—

"Why, cousin, I think I am pretty tolerable; I think so; and I have to thank you for it. Yes, I have. You may deny it, of course: you are a

modest man ; now I am not ; and I make bold to say that I owe my life to you. But, to come to the point. One good turn deserves another ; now, just tell me if I can be of any service to you ? ”

I made light of the assistance I had given him, and begged him not to lay so much stress upon it ; his offers of serving me I did not notice. Ferris was piqued, and said, with a little touch of his old mischievous vivacity,—

“ Aha, you don’t think my friendship worth having, cousin, do you ? Why, you’ve a deuce of a knack of making enemies ! There was first old Sir Hugh—yes, sir, I know all about poor Ada—then there was that unlucky fellow, Hartley——”

He was proceeding to check the names off on his fingers, when I rose with some displeasure, bowed, and made for the door.

“ Now sit down, sit down,” he cried out, “ don’t mind my little ways. I really wish to serve you.”

I paused and listened. He continued, twitching his dressing-gown, and kicking off first one slipper then the other,—

“Cousin, I’m awkwardly placed; I’m bound to secrecy, and have daughters; so can’t be as open as I could wish. But what I want to say to you is just this—go abroad!”

Rather astonished, I asked him why?

“That’s the mischief!” replied the old man, making extraordinary grimaces, and convulsively groping for his slippers with outstretched feet; “that’s the mischief! I can’t tell you why; can’t, really. But there, I have said my say. Go abroad, cousin—go abroad; it can’t do harm, and may do good. By-the-by, you don’t want any cash, do you?” and he fumbled in his pocket in a pondering kind of way, as if he were meditating a “tip” to an expectant school-boy.

I pressed for explanations; but Ferris curled himself up in his chair, and, stopping his ears, reiterated his assertion that he would say no more. “A wink was as good as a nod to a blind horse.” If I wouldn’t take his advice he couldn’t help it. He washed his hands of the whole affair.

I promised to think over his suggestion, more to pacify him than with any intention of following it, and hastened down-stairs. Scarcely had I

reached the street-door when Ferris, in a querulous voice called after me, dropping one of his slippers over the stairs in his agitation,—

“Chauncey, Chauncey! have you heard the news? Ministers are out! ’Tis announced in the *Chronicle*. Explanations will be given in the House to-morrow. Ministers are out! Yes, they are smashed; your friends,” he laid a stress on “friends,” “your friends are smashed! The Tories will come in!”

I thanked him for the information, which at the moment did not greatly affect me, and went home.

The afternoon’s adventure had made me late; and on arriving, I found the house lighted up in preparation for the dinner-party, and a number of servants and hired waiters lounging about the hall and passages. As soon as I was in my dressing-room, Rosamund came to me. She was elegantly dressed, but her loveliness was marred by the anxious, almost frightened, expression of her countenance.

“This is very extraordinary,” she exclaimed.

“Yes, dear, I fear it must seem so. But I could scarcely help being late; there was an accident in the Park.”

“Oh, I don’t mean your being late. The extraordinary thing is, that not a creature has arrived, and it is half an hour after the time !”

“You have not made a mistake in the day, surely ?” I asked.

“No, of course not: besides, here are three or four notes with excuses.”

One was from Lady Arabella, lamenting that she was not at home when her dear Rosamund called yesterday, as she wished to explain why she should be unable to join our party. Blaytant Browne had insisted on her going for a week to Brighton for the benefit of her health. The other notes were more unceremonious; even whilst Rosamund was speaking another arrived to the same purport.

“The Ministry resign to-morrow,” I hastily exclaimed. “There is great confusion. We shall have many disappointments no doubt.”

“Dear Herbert,” exclaimed Rosamund, putting her hand to her brow, “what does it all mean? Where will it end? The letter said the Ministry would resign—they have resigned. It said we should be outcasts from society; is that also coming true?”

I kissed her and laughed at her fears ; but I was far from being at my ease.

More notes arrived : some from members of the defunct Ministry, scribbled hastily in Downing Street, and despatched by a common porter. All contained excuses.

Dinner had been waiting more than an hour, and our drawing-rooms were empty. All of our invited guests, save three, had sent excuses. The fear now was lest those three should arrive ; our dinner-table, spread for thirty persons, would present a ridiculous appearance if they did.

Below stairs, the servants and hired waiters, congregated in a group in the hall, discussed the state of affairs loud enough for us to overhear. The French cook, specially engaged for the occasion, sat down in the housekeeper's room, and fairly burst into tears. It was the signal for one or two of the maids to burst out crying too.

In the dining-room the sideboard blazing with plate, the long table covered with choice ornaments and beautiful bouquets, and lighted up with a profusion of wax candles, all for nothing, looked inexpressibly dismal. It was like a painful dream. My wife sat at one of the drawing-room windows,

gazing into the gathering darkness. Her eyes were tearful, and there was a flush of shame and vexation on her cheek, but she endeavoured to restrain her emotion.

The spell, however, was broken at last; Winifred brought up a tray with dinner on it, and placed it in the boudoir communicating with the drawing-room. She then opened the folding-doors, lighted the candles, placed chairs for us at the table, and quietly retreated from the scene. The little room looked cheerful, the repast inviting. Why should we sit brooding over the insult offered to us by a handful of shallow-hearted worldlings? A few years hence, and where would they be? Six feet underground, and we ourselves likewise; it was folly to be miserable; the outrage inflicted was undeserved; the shame of it, therefore, was theirs, not ours.

Calling Winifred, I instructed her to clear the dining-room and dismiss the hired attendants. Then, sitting down by my wife, I took her hand in mine, and said that as long as she loved me and cared for me, I could set at nought the enmity and contempt of the whole world.

Suppressing the bitter thought of my own ship-

wrecked hopes and ruined political prospects, I drew a calm and soothing picture of the future, assuring her that my experience of public life, with its alternations of intoxicating success and humiliating failure, had only drawn my heart more closely to hers, and filled me with a longing for the peace of home. The effort to speak calmly, and without bitterness, was great, but I was rewarded. Those beautiful eyes were bent upon mine with loving tenderness; sorrow passed from her countenance. She told me I was dearer to her in my adversity, than in my prosperity. She asked me to pardon her impatience, her vehemence of spirit. Only let me trust her with my whole heart, thoroughly, unreservedly, and she would give herself up to me with the simplicity of a child; nay, obey me, and wait upon me as a servant.

We passed the evening tranquilly, nay, I might say, joyously. We talked long of future plans, home improvements, and a tour to Italy. Then Rosamund seated herself at the piano, and played from memory piece after piece of my favourite music; now breathing consolation, now reviving hopes that were weak and languid,

now rousing the drooping heart to energy and courage.

On a sudden we heard a carriage stop at the front door, and then came a knock. It was near eleven, and all thought of any guest arriving had of course been long abandoned; for the moment we had, indeed, forgotten the trouble and anxiety of the evening.

We looked at each other for a few moments in some perplexity. A card was brought in. It was William Vaughan's.

To me his unexpected arrival gave that sudden joy which is akin to tears. He was the only man who, at this juncture, could effectually assist me. Rosamund, less familiar with the circumstances, instinctively rejoiced with me, and we hastened downstairs to welcome him.

Our warm greetings over, I was concerned to notice my friend's altered appearance. There was the same steady, thoughtful firmness; but he was thin, pale, and care-worn. The accents of his voice were clear and precise as ever, but there was now and then a faintness in the tone that gave me pain.

"It is only a few days since," he said, after

we were all seated in my study, "that I learnt how shamefully and how cruelly your character has been belied in the public prints. I left Rouen, where I have been for some time residing with Edith, with all possible despatch, and have come to London to stand by you, and defend you to the best of my ability."

I pressed his hand with the gratitude of one who, exposed to ill-treatment in a foreign land, suddenly encounters a faithful friend, able and willing to succour him.

"I have already done somewhat," he went on, "in your behalf, for it is my habit to act before I speak. I have seen the editor of an influential journal this day, and have been introduced to two or three writers for the press, whose advocacy is worth securing. Of course, where so many charges have been advanced, it is wisest to select a few only for refutation; one calumny thoroughly crushed, the others will speedily lose their force, or evaporate altogether. I have grappled, then, chiefly with the election business, and I think successfully. A statement of mine will appear to-morrow, exonerating you from blame, explaining much that appears to tell against you,

and drawing attention to much that is to your credit."

We could scarce find words adequately to express our gratitude. I trusted he would make our house his home, but he declined.

"I have taken a room at an hotel in the Strand, and have already given my address to several parties; it will be wiser to remain where I am. To come under your roof might, to a certain extent, weaken the effect of my exertions on your behalf. My stay must be brief; Edith is alone in a strange place. The business in which I am engaged at Rouen does not permit both of us to be absent; she will be anxious for my return."

I questioned him about his health. He confessed that he was not strong, but his medical adviser thought the journey to London might prove beneficial.

Before quitting us for the night, Vaughan produced a letter from Folliott. Folliott had passed through Rouen, a few days since, on his road to Nice, where his grandfather, Lord Abermaur, lay ill.

I transcribe the letter:—

“DEAR HERBERT CHAUNCEY,

“Vaughan will give you this letter; he is starting for England, on your account. But I must begin at the beginning, for our adventure at Rouen verged on the romantic—so Eustace Pole says. It was quite an accident our meeting Vaughan. Eustace is desperately addicted to decayed churches, mildewed cloisters, stained glass, and such-like mediæval rubbish; so I agreed to stop a day at Rouen, and give him full swing in his favourite recreation. What is more, I suffered myself to be taken in tow along with himself, by a *valet de place* under a scorching sun, exploring antiquities, till Eustace was undeniably weary and myself inexpressibly bored.

“I broke my shin over a prostrate column outside St. Ouen, placed convenient for the discomfiture of the inquisitive sons of ‘*perfidè Albion*.’ I mused in the cathedral on the peculiar effect produced by the sun shining through coloured glass on the countenances of Eustace and the *valet de place*; inhaled, in various alleys and lanes, every variety of unpleasant smell in combination with the aroma of coffee; took off my hat to a weather-beaten statue of Joan of Arc, which, I

afterwards found was spurious; finally, sat down to a *table-d'hôte* dinner, in company with a *pot pourri*—you see I am getting on in my French—of yellow Yankees, voracious Germans, garrulous aborigines, and a swarm of middle-class English, male and female, trying not to look surprised at everything round them. Afterwards, we sallied forth, to smoke a cigar in the cool of the evening; we wandered along until we came to the boulevard.

“On a balcony of one of the houses near, I noticed an interesting young girl, doing a little amateur gardening on a small scale, *i.e.* watering a geranium and plucking off the dead leaves. ‘What a sweet face!’ was the involuntary exclamation of your humble servant. ‘Nonsense!’ stammered Eustace, ‘she don’t understand your English jargon. Speak French.’

“Rather to our confusion, the young lady seemed to have comprehended us perfectly, for she turned ‘celestial rosy red,’ as Isabella Ferris would say, and rushed into the house; we walked off, and sat down on one of the benches under the trees. Here we began to talk of the scurrilous attacks upon you in the *Morning Messenger* and

other Tory prints. Eustace told me how he had sent a spirited leader to a Whig paper, and how the editor coolly cut out all the telling passages to make it look impartial, and how thereupon the said editor and he came to an irretrievable rupture. Well, as we were talking, a man, plainly dressed, sitting on the other side of the tree, rose suddenly, and came round to us, leaning on his stick. Who should it be, but William Vaughan, the quondam ironmaster, and your old antagonist. He accosted us civilly, asked pardon for the liberty, but would be glad to know something more about these libellous attacks upon you.

“Being deep in his new business, Vaughan only reads *Galignani*, and that not regularly. So Eustace Pole, glad to perceive the interest he took in the subject, and thinking he might be of use, began to fire away at your enemies, in and out of Parliament, but, of course, being excited, stammered like an idiot, and I was forced to take up the tale. Fortunately, there were two or three newspaper slips in my pocket-book, Eustace and myself having been endeavouring to concoct a pamphlet on your behalf; Vaughan took them, and read them there and then, his countenance grow-

ing darker and darker ; at length, very wrath, he struck his stick against the ground, and declared he would see you righted, come what might. We went home with him to tea. Strange enough, his house was the identical one we had noticed just before, and the young lady was Miss Vaughan. There was a slight awkwardness at our first meeting ; but my offence was sufficiently venial in a woman's eyes, and there was the faintest little approach to a smile on the young lady's demure countenance when Vaughan made her shake hands with us as your friends.

“Eustace says her eyes are like one of Guercino's Sybils, so pensive, so deep, so full of mystery ; but then I have heard him say the same of at least nine women, within the last six months. She seemed singularly fond of her father, for after tea we had almost a scene. ‘Edith,’ he said, in a voice that struck me, I confess, as preternaturally solemn—‘Edith, from information received from these gentlemen, I find it will be my duty to leave you for a few days ; I must go to London.’

“Tears came into the poor girl's eyes, but she did not remonstrate, knowing, I suppose, it

would be of no use. She only murmured a wish that he should consult the 'doctor;' then quietly left the room to make preparations for his journey, and, I fear, to weep. He looked after her affectionately, but paid little heed to what she said, or how she looked. Vaughan starts to-morrow, and I am sitting up at my hotel writing this long letter, that he may take it with him.

"It vexes me that my grandfather's weak condition has kept me almost in constant attendance upon him at a time when I might have been useful to you. At first he was better, but now the medical man travelling with him urges me to join him, as there is a change for the worse. I hear the *sposa* is greatly admired; Languedoc speaks approvingly of both of you, an unusual thing with him. Present my affectionate remembrances, and believe me, as always,

"Yours sincerely,

"FOLLIOTT."

CHAPTER XII.

THROWING OFF THE MASK.

THE Ministry resigned next day, and Lord Spetchley was sent for. A dissolution was imminent, and it was difficult to make a House in consequence of members rushing into the country to canvass their constituents. For myself I was in some doubt what course to take; the troubles of the last few weeks had almost disgusted me with public life, and to undergo so soon the expense and annoyance of a fresh election, was anything but a pleasant prospect. Besides, it was probable the Tories would throw me over, and select another candidate; most of my political friends believed I had sold myself to the Whigs, and there had been already a preliminary meeting, with a view to the choice of a better man than myself; Paul Muckleworth had literally taken to his bed, broken-hearted

at my backsliding conduct, and vowed he would never shake hands with me again; my seat was therefore to all appearance lost.

Yet Vaughan's arrival, and his vigorous advocacy, raised my spirits greatly. His statement concerning the election, told in my favour; his personal representations to editors of newspapers were still more effective.

Vaughan was greatly astonished at the aversion with which I was regarded, and the prejudice against me that had taken root in quarters too respectable to be influenced by mere pecuniary considerations; here and there it was impossible to obtain even a fair hearing. In many places, however, Vaughan's communications received due attention, and were at once made public. We thought it prudent to accept a species of apology from the editor of the *Morning Messenger*, and suspend further proceedings against him; for a few days there was a partial lull in the tempest of abuse raging in the newspaper press, if not an approach to reaction in my favour. My spirits rose, and I found myself more than once beginning to repent of my determination to abandon public life.

I had urged Vaughan to procure the best medical advice before returning to France, and he promised he would do so as soon as the object of his visit was accomplished. He had laboured on my behalf with considerable success, but he wished to carry his operations further. We must trace the calumnies home to their source, and if possible detect who was the chief author of the mischief.

We met one morning at Vaughan's hotel to talk the matter over quietly. I frankly told him my suspicion, or rather, I should say, conviction, that my secret foe was Sir Hugh Littlecot; I reminded him of Sir Hugh's letter to Hartley, breathing vindictive feelings towards me in every line; I mentioned the anonymous letters, inspired by a restless spirit of hatred that, whilst planning a deadly blow, amuses itself by inflicting petty subordinate tortures on its victim; I alluded to the voice that accosted me on leaving the House after my successful speech, and suggested that Annandale, one of the late Ministry, Sir Hugh's near relative and expectant heir, might have been, perhaps unconsciously to himself, employed in involving me in trouble and

embarrassment; the appointment of Apwood, made without consulting me, yet proposed to the Prime Minister as a compliment gratifying to my feelings, especially struck me as a probable instance of this kind.

I no sooner mentioned Apwood's name than Vaughan appeared more than usually interested. He reflected awhile, and then said:—

“You have mentioned Apwood's appointment; by all means thoroughly investigate the whole matter; but let me ask you, my friend, a short question—Is Apwood a man in whom you place confidence?”

Vaughan's manner made me uneasy; he saw it, and went on,—

“Frankly, I never liked him. I know something of his early life; something of his character from boyhood upwards. You may say this makes me prejudiced. Well, let there be due allowance for that. But how is it that this man appears to be mixed up in every single misfortune you have suffered since your marriage? I do not see my way distinctly. All I can say is, be on your guard against him. He is either singularly unlucky, or indubitably a villain. Be on your

guard. Take the caution for what it is worth ; but do not forget it."

It was not likely I should do so. Vaughan, however, appeared fatigued with the exertion of conversation, and I proposed to leave him and return next morning ; he assented with reluctance.

"Chauncey, I have more to say to you, but I feel you are right. Would that I had health and strength equal to the task of extricating you from your difficulties ! But my counsel may at least be useful. To-morrow, then, let us meet."

I rose to depart, but, at the instant, the waiter of the hotel entered with a foreign letter directed to Vaughan ; it had been sent through some accident to a wrong hotel. Vaughan opened the letter hastily. No sooner had he read the first few lines than his countenance changed to an ashen hue, and his hand trembled ; he turned suddenly to me, and exclaimed,—

"My friend, I must quit London sooner than I anticipated. Edith requires her father's protection ; she is exposed to daily insult and annoyance from some persons unknown. It is most

unfortunate to be compelled to leave you at this juncture, but there is no alternative ; I must return in order to protect her from the villains who are taking advantage of my absence to torment her."

The paleness of his face passed away, and his hand no longer trembled ; there was a slight flush in his cheek, and a frown upon his brow. He rose with a vigour I should not have expected, and, ringing the bell, inquired of the waiter what steamer started to Havre from London or Southampton that night ? Then, turning to me, added, in a hurried voice,—

"I must ask you now to leave me. Business will occupy me all the morning ; I start by the night mail for Southampton, and from thence to Havre. Come to me this evening ; I must see you, if it be only for five minutes ; I have something important to communicate. Meantime, lay these words to heart—be cautious, vigilant, and firm."

He pressed my hand in his ; it was as cold as ice. I begged him to let me assist him in his preparations, or at least to send my servant to him. No, he thought he should be better alone ;

he should go to his room for half an hour and lie down ; it would calm him.

I left him reluctantly, for his manner showed a good deal of suppressed excitement. No sooner had I left the room, and descended some of the stairs, than his door again opened. "Chauncey, did you call my name?"

I returned, and he repeated the question. No, I had not spoken. Vaughan was surprised, but merely said,—

"Well, my imagination must have played me a trick. Farewell, again ; and, remember, this evening, punctually at seven."

I prevailed on him to lie down, and made him promise to send for a physician if he did not feel better as the day advanced.

At home I found a letter waiting for me ; it was from Languedoc, and marked "private."

"MY DEAR CHAUNCEY,

"I am off to the provinces to do the polite to my constituents. But before starting, I write you a friendly hint on one or two points on which my lips were sealed, so long as our people were in. You do not seem to be aware that both Esher's

and Apwood's appointments were arranged in perfect good faith, simply from a wish to oblige you. Neither Padroon, nor Browne, nor myself, nor, as far as I can make out, even Annandale, cared two straws about the one or the other. I need not say the whole thing got wind too soon; it was through the extraordinary stupidity of your friend Annandale; but this is *entre nous*. The point I wish to make clear is that we understood we were consulting your expressed wishes. For instance, your man of business certainly made use of your name in applying for the clerkship; it is right you should know this, although I am taking a horribly unconventional step in telling you, but the fact is, after I heard your speech, I came to the conclusion that you had not been fairly dealt with. I say all this in strictest confidence; it is not in my power to do more. Wishing you success in Meadshire, or elsewhere,

“I am, yours truly,

“F. LANGUEDOC.”

What was the meaning of Languedoc's styling Lord Annandale “my friend?” No doubt, long ago, when I was supposed to be paying attention

to Ada Littlecot, Annandale had procured me a small diplomatic appointment. But why? To do me a kindness? or simply to oblige Sir Hugh who wished to get me out of the way? I never doubted that the latter was the real object in view. Besides, since breaking off my engagement with Ada, Lord Annandale, in common with all the Littlecot clan, had treated me as an utter stranger; to be sure he had resumed a bowing acquaintance after my speech on the famous Bill, but that arose from political considerations and was worth nothing.

I resolved to seek a solution of the mystery at head-quarters; I wrote to Lord Padroon, and requested an interview that afternoon. The reply was kind and gracious; his lordship would receive me in a couple of hours from that time precisely. I went. There was no Lord Padroon—business of pressing importance called him to the north; his secretary was there in his stead, and, after an hour's fruitless talk, I left the house as wise as I entered it.

Baffled and irritated, I now turned to Apwood. He was in London, and immediately obeyed the summons I sent to his lodgings. The moment the

man was shown into my room, I noticed something strange in his manner ; he was flushed, his lip quivered, his eyes avoided mine more than ever.

Without allowing me to enter on the subject in which I was so much interested, he began the conversation himself, in a hurried, rather monotonous voice, as if he had learnt by rote what he was saying.

“ I shall always feel indebted to you, Mr. Chauncey, for your kindness in appointing me your agent ; and for all the confidence you have placed in me. I hope I have laboured to show my gratitude by zealously promoting your interests. If it were not for that, I don't really know how I should be able to look you in the face to-day, when I have to make so serious a communication to you.”

He paused, and certainly did not look me in the face. I was perplexed and annoyed, but told him to proceed, for I had something to say to him myself.

“ No doubt, Mr. Chauncey, you are aware that when your cousin Jeffry went abroad, he took with him a lady who never left him till his

death. But you are not perhaps aware that that lady was my sister."

"Rely upon it, sir, that had I known it you never would have been agent of mine!"

A contemptuous smile flickered over Apwood's countenance for a moment; then he answered:—

"Well, I should have thought an eminent lover of justice, like yourself, would have felt all the more kindly disposed to the brother of a woman who had been, to say the least, very indifferently treated by the head of the Chauncey family. Let that pass. What interests yourself in the matter is this: my sister, after living with your cousin a few years, was lawfully married to him."

He again paused; but, as I made no remark, continued:—

"Lawfully married to him at Guernsey by special licence. Yes, your cousin made her all the amends in his power; he made her what the world calls an 'honest woman.' But he married her clandestinely. He was ashamed—and I am sorry for it—he was ashamed of marrying a woman beneath him in society, whose life had not been

strictly regular. Failing health and the painful infirmities of old age awakened his conscience; he came to the conclusion that he must marry: but the family credit must be preserved. He would marry my sister to save his own soul, but would keep it secret to maintain the honour of the house of Ferris. He had already transferred to her name in the funds a sum of money, the interest of which was adequate for her subsistence as well as mine; more was expected of him, but, as you are aware, your cousin fell into a state of imbecility, that wholly incapacitated him for business. He died, leaving my sister no better off, in a pecuniary point of view, than she would have been without the marriage. She did not survive him many months; though not rigidly virtuous, she loved him; and I verily believe it was more for his peace of mind than hers, that my sister went through the irksome formality of the marriage ceremony. Be that as it may, I, as her brother, rejoice in the marriage, clandestine as it was; it was an act of justice to her, and to some extent to myself."

Apwood's manner, as he proceeded, became more free and unconstrained. His voice was firmer,

and a subdued exultation gleamed now and then from his averted eyes.

“Well,” I said, with some coldness, “I am bound to approve of the step my cousin took. I am bound to congratulate you on the tardy amends made to your sister.”

Apwood, resuming his wonted manner, rejoined, in a lower voice,—

“You have the least reason of any man living to congratulate me.”

“Explain yourself, sir!” was my impatient rejoinder.

“You inherited your cousin’s property under a will dated previous to the marriage. There was a child born subsequent to the marriage; it died in the course of a few weeks. But no matter; the fact remains that the will was dated previous to the marriage, and that no other will exists.”

The consequences flashed across my mind with lightning speed.

If Apwood spoke truth, the will must be null and void, and I was not the lawful owner of Glenarvon.

When strange and painful intelligence is un-

expectedly conveyed to us, it is natural to seek a reason for discrediting the bearer, even though he be a familiar friend; the man who brings evil tidings is often looked upon with an evil eye. Much more so, then, was such the case when that man was Henry Apwood. My growing suspicions and latent doubts took sudden form and consistency. The tale he had just told me put the seal on the evidence accumulated against him in the recesses of my mind; he stood revealed before me, a base and sordid villain, plotting my ruin for his own pecuniary advantage.

I rose abruptly, exclaiming,—

“Sir, I have for some time past had good reason to suspect your fidelity, and I heartily thank you for throwing off the mask. You may start, sir, and feign astonishment; but I know you now. You may be a tool of others, but I believe you to be a willing and a knavish one.”

I was excited, and in a voice trembling with passion, continued,—

“Do you hear, sir? I do not believe a word of your story, and dare you and your employers to do your worst!”

Apwood had resumed all his honest humility of

manner. Taking from his breast pocket a parcel of old mildewed papers, he replied, mildly,—

“I am aware, Mr. Chauncey, that mine is an odious task; and can make full allowance for your irritation. But you cannot deny that, if what I have stated is true, it behoves me, from regard to my sister’s memory, and the rights of your cousin’s heir-at-law, to follow the matter up. Yet trust me, sir, roughly as you have dealt with me, if any bargain can be made, satisfactory to all parties, I, for one, shall be only too glad to say ‘done’ to it. I am a quiet, well-meaning man, and would not deal harshly with the poorest peasant in Meadshire, much more a courteous employer, and, I did hope I might have said, friend.”

Disgust possessed me more and more; I began positively to loathe him.

“Mr. Apwood, I have had the misfortune to be your employer, but never your friend. Do what you please; do what you have doubtless long ago resolved to do, but spare me the infliction of empty apologies and dishonest regrets.”

“Believe me, sir, you are unjust; I fear some secret enemy has poisoned your mind against

me. My desire is to act moderately, cautiously, and with the kindest consideration for yourself and Mrs. Chauncey, for whom I entertain sentiments of sincere regard."

"Keep your sentiments to yourself, and do not venture to utter my wife's name."

"Mr. Chauncey, Mr. Chauncey, picture to yourself my embarrassing position. My sister's honour, the just rights of others, constrain me to sacrifice one whom I conscientiously esteem. It is painful, it is heartrending!"

Apwood appeared affected, or probably seized the opportunity of regaining the self-possession that began to fail him, by giving free vent to his agitation. He put his handkerchief to his eyes, but it was to wipe his humid forehead; he walked to the open window, but it was to cool his cheek, flushed with shame and confusion; such was my impression at the time, and my indignation was only aggravated.

"Maybe so," I said. "But I wish this interview to cease." And I stretched out my hand to the bell.

"Stop, sir," cried Apwood, with real or feigned emotion. "Let us not part thus. Here are the

bulk of the papers establishing the fact of the marriage; here is the marriage certificate, found amongst my sister's effects after her decease. Observe the date. Here are other documents throwing light on the transaction. You know your cousin's handwriting. You know that of Malpus, your late steward. Take the papers and examine them; I place them in your hands unreservedly, and with perfect confidence. Take them, and when we next meet, I trust you may regard me, if not with less aversion, at least with less contempt."

He pressed the papers upon me with quivering lip, and eyes clouded by emotion. I was struck, and a passing doubt rebuked me; had the shock of this painful intelligence driven me beyond the bounds of just and necessary caution? Anxious as I ever was to act uprightly, even though it were to my own hindrance, I endeavoured to weigh the matter fairly in my mind; but my thoughts were too much disordered to do so effectually. However, after a short pause, I took the papers, observing,—

"You give me these documents to examine? But I cannot consent to take them in this

irregular manner ; an inventory of them should be drawn up, and some third person witness their delivery."

"I had anticipated this contingency," said Apwood, "and, if you insist upon it, my friend who is waiting below will step up and see the papers delivered to you."

The friend was shown up, and, not a little to my disgust, turned out to be Mr. Crawdle, the quondam coroner of Meadshire. He bowed with an air of profound deference, sitting down upon the edge of a chair as if the indulgence was almost too great for him. Apwood drew me aside for a moment and apologized for bringing him.

"But you perceive that as yet the matter is known only to a select few: Crawdle, from causes you will hereafter understand, is one of these. In the event of an arrangement, the fewer who are let into the secret the better."

I told him, with some austerity of manner, to drop all mention of an arrangement, and return to business. One question only I wished to put—

"Was my cousin Ferris acquainted with this story?"

Apwood said,—

“Why, he has an inkling—just an inkling of it.”

My suspicions were again aroused. Was this the reason Ferris advised my going abroad? Did he want to get me out of the way at a moment critical to my fortunes? And Crawdle, too!—a disreputable fellow, who had already been pushed forwards to do me injury.

I walked hastily to the table. Would it not be more prudent to refuse to have anything to do with these papers? Would it not be wiser to show these gentlemen out of the house, and refer them with the papers to my solicitors? Such was my first impulse; but, unfortunately, instead of acting, I paused to reason and reflect. Here were documents of grave moment. Here was an opportunity of seeing, as it were, my enemy's hand, and examining his game. I would keep these papers for a day or two, and thoroughly examine them. No harm, I thought, could accrue to me. I would keep them; show them, if need be, to my solicitors, and then return them.

Accordingly, counting them over separately, and placing my initials on each, requesting Apwood to do the same, I took the papers, and

dismissed my companions, without further comment or delay. Crawlle, leaning his double chin upon the handle of his umbrella, did not favour me with any observation whilst I was examining the papers, but watched me in silence, and when I showed him and Apwood out of the room, nothing could be more deferential than his manner. It seemed as if he had been carefully instructed how to behave, and had acted upon his instructions with great fidelity. Yet, when I heard him, on reaching the bottom of the stairs—no doubt under the idea that he was out of hearing—give the coarse, vulgar chuckle with which I was familiar, my mind felt uneasy and disturbed.

I would at once consult my solicitor on the subject of Apwood's improbable story.

CHAPTER XIII.

TROUBLES AT HOME AND ABROAD.

My friend Mr. Ruffhead was out when I called at Lincoln's Inn, and I was obliged to show the documents to a junior member of the firm; he was, however, zealous and intelligent. We examined the papers in a cursory way, but the operation even then was tedious. If the letters were genuine, there was certainly no doubt that my cousin was privately married to Lucy Apwood, a few years previous to his decease; but the exact date did not appear, either in my cousin's or Lucy Apwood's letters, and the only decisive evidence was contained in the marriage certificate, of which more presently.

In one of my cousin's letters, allusion was made to Malpus, the steward. This person, my cousin said, would receive a handsome gratuity for his services on an occasion of importance. Attached

to this letter, was the copy of a statement, made by Malpus, relative to the marriage; the man deposed to having been present on the occasion. The marriage certificate was an extract from the register book; the two witnesses were Malpus, and a foreigner, by name Pierre Duprez; it was more regularly drawn up than was common forty years since. The date was subsequent to the codicil to the will; but was there no ground to suspect that the marriage certificate had been tampered with? Both the solicitor and myself did not feel by any means satisfied on that point. Yet an application to the proper quarter corroborated Apwood's story to a certain extent. A special licence had been granted to my cousin to marry Lucy Apwood, but granted nearly three months previous to the alleged date of the marriage. After all it might turn out that the marriage was not valid: this would save me all further trouble.

It was now, however, drawing towards evening. Solicitors, like other folk, must dine, and, however important the subject of our conference, it became necessary to adjourn further discussion till to-morrow.

On my way home, I looked in at my club, and found great excitement prevailing. Parliament was dissolved, and men were scattered in groups, up-stairs and down-stairs, warmly discussing the prospects of a new election. Whilst turning over the newspapers, a message came to me from Rosamund. I was immediately wanted at home.

Thither I repaired, and found my wife waiting for me in great anxiety. Two messages had been sent, within the last half-hour, from the Strand Hotel, stating that Vaughan was seriously ill; a physician had driven to my door, having just come from Vaughan, and expressed a wish to see me. It was thought I was at the House, and a note was despatched thither, a few minutes before my arrival. This intelligence filled us with sorrow. Rosamund undertook to write to Edith Vaughan, acquainting her with her father's illness, and begging her to come to us by the next steamer from Havre.

I was naturally flurried and nervous as I sprang into the carriage waiting to take me to the hotel; yet I thought I could not be mistaken in a countenance that, for an instant, and an instant only,

appeared at the window of a house on the opposite side of the street.

What business had Sir Hugh Littlecot there?

To be sure the question might have been answered by another—Is that any affair of yours? Yet I could not divest myself of a presentiment of evil; I could not resist the chill that fell upon my spirit, when I saw him thus, as it were, watching my movements, and, perhaps, exulting in my misfortunes.

However, when my carriage reached the Strand, I felt the necessity for exertion, and ascended the hotel stairs with a quick, but steady step.

I asked to be shown to my friend's room, and a nurse, already hired to wait on him, appeared at the bedroom door, and in a whisper informed me that peremptory orders had been given to admit no one until the doctor's return. The doctor was expected shortly, and I sat down in the small sitting-room communicating with the bedroom, and waited for him with as much patience as I could muster.

Few things are more painful than serious illness in the crowded hotel of a large city. The bustle and confusion are bad enough; the

trampling of feet, ringing of bells, slamming of doors, aggravating to the last degree.

But what distresses most the minds of those striving to succour and comfort the sufferer, is the absence of privacy. A stream of strange faces passes all day long in and out of that vast and many-roomed building; up and down stairs, along the passages, into adjoining rooms to your own, sometimes into your own by mistake. You feel that you are watched and stared at, and that your grief and anxiety are topics of careless discussion. To obtain quiet is impossible; in a large family hotel, most of the sojourners are bent on pleasant excursions, and, full of thoughtless gaiety, cannot realize the notion of sickness and sorrow.

I sat on the horsehair-covered sofa of the sitting-room, listlessly, yet with a strong consciousness of all my troubles, examining the faded pictures on the wall, and the round convex mirror over the chimney-piece that as if in mockery reflected the room in distorted and exaggerated proportions. In the apartment on the opposite side of the passage, a gentleman, with a hoarse voice, apparently from the country, who had been

ringing his bell without pausing for several minutes and had at last broken the bell-rope, shouted to the waiter for another bottle of port. In the room above, half a dozen children, belonging to a family on their way to the Continent, were amusing themselves by playing leap-frog over the chairs and tables. Below, a lady, partial to music, was performing, with feverish energy, all the old tunes she could remember, on a cracked piano. Two or three young men, fresh from the races, who had been regaling themselves with something stronger than water, formed a group at the top of the stairs, talking over the events of the day and raising their voices from time to time when anything like a joke was perpetrated, under the impression, common to persons in a state of incipient inebriety, that the public generally would be gratified to hear what they were saying; whilst on an upper lobby, a porter had let fall a trunk of some size, which, rolling downstairs, hopping lightly from step to step, threatened to disperse the group of young men in a way more abrupt than pleasant; the porter shouted to them to "have a care," but shouted in vain. A maid, with a warming-pan, was bawling out

the number of the room in which the hoarse-voiced gentleman had been ringing the bell, and a waiter, with a voice like the yelping of a dog, was screaming, "Coming! Coming!" in some remote part of the hotel.

Add to all this, a confused undercurrent of minor clamour and the perpetual roar of carriages in the streets, and you will have some idea of my feelings, knowing, as I did, that Vaughan's attack was supposed to be an affection of the brain, and that perfect quiet had been enjoined by the doctor.

Downstairs I presently hastened, and discovering with some difficulty the sanctum of the proprietor, Mr. Mash, found him, attired in the extreme of fashion, drinking seltzer-water out of a silver mug. Mr. Mash was polite, but truth compels me to add, it was evident he too had been to the races, and was by no means in a lucid frame of mind. He violently rang the bell for the waiter, but, forgetting what he had wanted him for, swore at him in a leisurely way, in order to gain time to recollect; I came to his aid, and Mr. Mash wound up by commanding the waiter not to make such a diabolical "row" when there was

a gentleman dying in number 59. The waiter flipped a fly off the window-frame with his napkin, uttered a lively affirmative, and vanished; the next moment I heard him yelling out "Coming, sir," in a distant passage, with renovated energy. The proprietor sank back into his arm-chair, drank his seltzer-water, and asked, in a friendly way, whether I expected Touchstone would have gone the pace he did?

This would not do, and I made a fresh voyage of discovery, in search of the womankind. The wife of the proprietor at length made her appearance, hot, jaded, and breathless, for she was the soul of the establishment. At first Mrs. Mash was vexed at my appeal. "Sick folk oughtn't to come to hotels. Wouldn't it be better to remove him to a nice lodging the other side of the street?" When, however, I put the case strongly and feelingly, like most women, she melted; into each individual room in the hotel, Mrs. Mash proceeded, dropping curtsy after curtsy, and entreated the inmates to remember the poor sick gentleman in number 59. I believe the poor lady did nothing else all that night, but enjoin silence on the maids, implore her

inmates to be as quiet as possible, and dog the waiter from passage to passage, crying, "Hush!" in rather louder accents than his own exclamation of "Coming, sir, coming!" Straw was laid down in the street, and matters were altogether improved, but complete tranquillity was physically impossible.

On returning to the sitting-room, I sat down to rest after my exertions; but the door into the bedroom being open, I heard Vaughan utter my name in a loud, anxious whisper. Notwithstanding the doctor's injunction, I could not, on hearing myself called, refrain from entering the room; I softly stepped to the bedside and spoke to him. To my grief and alarm, I perceived at a glance that Vaughan did not recognize me; he looked at me wildly, and a painful expression of wonderment crossed his flushed countenance. Then he abruptly turned his face to the wall, and murmured to himself in a low, inarticulate whisper.

I withdrew, with a heavy heart, to the adjoining room. Presently the doctor arrived, and with him a physician of distinction, who I had suggested should be called in. After seeing their patient, and holding their consultation, they sent for me,

and the physician, taking my hand kindly, made me sit by him on the sofa; then, in a firm, decided voice, with fluency and force of expression, he rapidly described to me the nature of the attack, and sketched its usual course and probable termination.

The physician would not feed me with false hopes. It was a case of extreme danger, but all that was possible should be done for his relief, and there was no reason to despair. I listened in deep anxiety, and, as soon as the physician had taken his departure, hastened home to pass an hour or two with Rosamund, intending to return and sleep at the hotel.

There were many letters in my study that needed to be answered; my wife took pen and ink, and, whilst I lay on the sofa, wrote at my dictation.

The night drew on, and it was almost time to return to the hotel, when we were startled by a loud knock at the front door; the servants appeared to be in bed, for no one paid attention to it. I hastened down, fearing it was bad news from the hotel. On opening the street door, I found outside a policeman.

“So you’ve awoke at last, Master Joe,” was his first exclamation. “Oh, I beg your pardon, sir, I thought you was the butler. I looked in, and sung out loud enough, but your people are uncommon heavy sleepers, sir. Your area gate’s unlocked, and the shutters of the kitchen window as wide open as they can stare.”

I thanked him, and was about to close the door, when he added, in a lower tone,—

“What makes me particklar like, sir, is just this. I once seed a chap come out of that there kitchen nigh four o’clock in the morning, when no honest man hadn’t ought to be seen out of bed, leastways down areas.”

I bade him good-night, saying I would make inquiry to-morrow, and he proceeded on his beat. That night I slept at the hotel; Vaughan continued for the next twenty-four hours in much the same state, neither better nor worse; the surgeon undertook to take my place the following night, and I accordingly slept at home.

Very early in the morning, whilst it was still dark, Rosamund woke me by suddenly exclaiming,—

“Herbert, there is some one moving about the house!”

Now to be roused from slumber by an alarm of thieves is particularly uncomfortable, not to say trying to the nerves; however, I jumped out of bed, rubbed my eyes, put on my dressing-gown, and seized the poker—the orthodox manual and platoon exercise on such emergencies. Then, being thoroughly awake, I began to ask where Rosamund had heard the noise.

“Below—in the room below; but, Herbert dear, don’t go alone; ring the bell, and call up the men. I will get your pistols.”

Thinking that it might be after all a false alarm, I would not rouse the house, but sallied forth to reconnoitre, whilst Rosamund went for my pistols. Having unlocked the door at the end of our passage, I descended the best staircase; sure enough there was a light under the door of my sitting-room, on the lower floor. It was not much past three o’clock, and I could now scarcely doubt that thieves were in the house. My first inclination was to run down, rush into my room, and fall upon the intruders *pêle-mêle*. Reflecting, however, that I might be

overpowered by numbers, I turned back to fetch my pistols; the same moment the dressing-room bell was rung with violence, and the shrill sound echoed through the whole house; the light in the room below disappeared.

I had reached the lobby communicating with the back-stairs as well as the front, and was groping my way in the dark as fast as I could, when some one rushed suddenly upon me from behind, seized me with frantic vehemence so as to pinion my arms to my side, and screamed,—

“Help! help! Thieves! thieves! Murder! murder!”

Struggling to release myself from a grasp that was positively painful, a flash of sudden light, accompanied by a stunning report of firearms, illumined the passage; by sheer force I broke from the wiry arms that held me, and as I did so, heard Winifred humbly asking pardon. In the darkness she had mistaken me for one of the thieves. Through stifling fumes of gunpowder I rushed to my dressing-room, and found poor Rosamund, half paralyzed with alarm, her long hair streaming over her shoulders, her face pale as death, and a pistol, just discharged,

smoking in her clenched hand ; the light from a gas-lamp in the street shone into the room, and the moment Rosamund saw that I was safe, she dropped the pistol, and sank into a chair. Alarmed by Winifred's screams, she had attempted to cock the pistol, and in doing so touched the trigger ; fortunately, the muzzle was pointed towards the window, and no harm was done.

By this time the servants began to swarm round us, voluble in their talk, and eager to distinguish themselves now the danger was over. For myself, the moment Rosamund was safe in Winifred's charge, I ran down to my sitting-room, and struck a light. The books and papers were in confusion ; chairs were upset, and drawers broken open. Proceeding to the dining-room floor I found nothing disturbed, but in the butler's pantry there were distinct traces of the thieves ; two or three articles of plate, carelessly left out, were missing, and a heap of table-linen had been collected together as if for removal ; the larder had been opened, and some food abstracted. The most painful feature in the case was, that the door below, leading into the area, was open, and through that door the thieves,

whoever they were, had evidently found both ingress and egress.

Rosamund was so unwell from the fright and exertion that she remained in bed a great part of the day. Another of our household was compelled to do the same: this was poor Winifred; in freeing myself from her grasp, not knowing in the excitement of the moment who was holding me, I had used considerable force, and regretted to find her wrist was severely strained; the pain made her faint and sick, and before evening she asked leave to apply half a dozen leeches to the arm.

In the meantime the police were called in, and a strict search instituted. In my study, near the table, the drawers of which had been prized open, the police-sergeant picked up a small steel bar: to my surprise, on holding it to the light, it proved to be my own; I had used it for opening picture-cases or other packing-boxes. It must have been taken from the top of a bookcase in the same room: no one but a servant would have been likely to lay his hand on it. Again, in the larder, lying on the floor, was one of my silk-handkerchiefs; it seemed strange, since my clothes upstairs had not been disturbed, that this

should be found there. In the larder was a candlestick, belonging to my dressing-room; the thief, or thieves, must have passed down the passage and visited my dressing-room, in order to obtain the silk-handkerchief and the candlestick; yet the door of this passage was locked, and the key in the inside, when I went down-stairs. It was very perplexing, yet this much was clear: the thief must have had an accomplice in the house.

The sergeant, after a wearisome altercation with the servants, took me aside, and said there were only two modes of explaining the robbery. It must be either one of my own servants, and "precious sharp he must be," or else—and here he put on the expression of face men who never joke adopt, when compelled to joke against their will—"or else, sir——"

"Well, Mr. Sergeant, or else what?"

"Why, sir, or else it must have been your very own self, sir!" and he grinned, ostentatiously, from ear to ear, as if fully conscious of the absurdity of the notion.

I thanked him for his assistance, and dismissed him and his men with a small present.

Next morning I gave warning to all my servants except Winifred. Even in her case I had some doubts; but she had not only behaved very well in the *fracas* of last night, she was a servant zealously attentive in the discharge of her duties, and, as we had satisfied ourselves over and over again, punctiliously honest in money matters.

The one thing against her was the nocturnal rendezvous with Alphonse, and I confess, when the policeman asserted that a man had been seen issuing from the house at three in the morning, an unpleasant suspicion crossed my mind that it might be Alphonse. I had warned Winifred, as soon as I had ascertained the man was reinstated in Sir Hugh's service, that instant dismissal would be the consequence of her renewing her acquaintance with him; she had promised never to speak to him again; but women are not invariably faithful to their promises. In confidence, however, I questioned the police, and learnt, beyond all doubt, that Alphonse, Sir Hugh's valet, was not now in London—had not been there for a week; this greatly reassured my mind.

CHAPTER XIV.

TRAVELLING HOME.

As soon as I could leave home I drove to the Strand Hotel. The physicians had met that morning, consulted, written prescriptions, and taken their departure. There was no decided change in Vaughan's state; hour by hour he lay with his face to the wall, muttering in a low voice.

The shutters were closed, to keep the light from his eyes; but, by degrees, the objects round became visible to me. In one corner of the room was Vaughan's portmanteau, partially packed for travelling; the clothes he would, perhaps, never wear again, lay heaped up beside it. On a table near his bed, amidst physic-bottles and glasses, was Vaughan's Bible; it was old and worn. I took it up, and turned over the pages. The light was not strong enough to enable me to read, but

I noticed pencil-marks and notes on the margin of the pages. To me the darkness mattered little; the splendour of noonday would have failed to enable me to understand and lay to heart the words of the sacred volume in my hand. The world, its pleasures and cares—pleasure so capricious, cares so ceaselessly recurring—the world was my portion. I clove to it with blind affection, even whilst writhing from its cruel wounds.

Soon the scene began to depress me beyond my powers of endurance; I relinquished my place to the nurse, and went into the next room to write letters. All the afternoon Vaughan appeared quieter, and a faint hope began to stir at the bottom of my heart; I took a turn in the street, noisy and bustling though it was, for the sake of diverting my mind from its accumulated anxieties. On re-entering the sitting-room, the nurse accosted me with a countenance as much alarmed as she thought consistent with a professional reputation for strong nerves. The doctor had looked in, and found Vaughan, if anything, better, but since then, there had been a sad change. The nurse said he was much more excited, and, what was worse, talked “gibberish.”

It was, indeed, true that the patient's manner was more restless; he tossed about, and stared at vacancy, as if he saw faces invisible to us. As for the "gibberish," I found that it was French; for strangely enough, about the time the steamer he intended to sail by would have reached Havre, Vaughan had begun to speak in that language; it was evident he was enacting the incidents of the journey; he hurried the porters with the luggage, implored the *douaniers* not to lose time; and, ordering a carriage, incessantly urged the postilion to drive faster. We had been forewarned that the fever would increase towards night; I did not myself, therefore, feel there was any cause for additional anxiety, but with the nurse it was different; that worthy woman was entirely taken aback by the foreign language. Every time poor Vaughan uttered a French word, she would groan audibly, and clasp her hands piously.

"If the good gentleman would only speak English, she shouldn't mind. 'Tis what we all are subject to. But talk that foreign lingo for all the world as if anybody could understand him! 'Tis awful work, sir, 'tis indeed."

I did not like to sleep anywhere but at home

that night, and left Vaughan to the care of the surgeon.

Before I started for the hotel next morning, Apwood called, by appointment, to receive back the papers he had entrusted to me. Crawdle, who appeared to be now his inseparable companion, followed at his heels.

Apwood looked hot and constrained. Crawdle's white, fat face was, as usual, vulgarly serene and complacent. Sitting at his ease, and placing one corpulent leg over the other, he unbuttoned part of his waistcoat, and complained of the sultriness of the weather.

"But 'tis healthy, sir," he added; "heat is healthy; it keeps the pores open, sir, and carries off the humours."

The man's vulgar familiarity annoyed me. Apwood observed that he thought the weather would change.

"No, my dear sir," rejoined Crawdle, "it can't. The barometer is 'riz,' as they say on 'Change. Besides, have you seen my 'tables'? No? Well, gentlemen, the loss is yours—ha, ha, ha! My tables have been kept regularly for twenty-one years, registering the results of the

thermometer, barometer, and hygrometer—Mason's hygrometer, gentlemen; well, they show an average of twelve and a half warm, sunny days in August. Now if it should rain to-morrow, my average for the last seven years would be flooded—flooded, sir, positively flooded! 'Tis as clear as the nose on my face, it can't rain. So, Apwood, I recommend you, by way of a good spec, to pawn your umbrella—ha, ha, ha!”

Apwood again struck in with,—

“So Parliament is dissolved this week.”

“What's the odds to an honest man, sir?” rejoined Crawdle. “My withers are unwrung!” as Shakspeare beautifully observes.

“Well,” I at length interposed, “we had best proceed to business: I am recommended to return you the papers at once, and to request you to furnish copies instead.”

“Certainly, certainly; business is business, and must not be neglected,” rejoined Crawdle, “however unpleasant it be. Yes, my dear sir—taking the privilege of a neighbour to call you so—sorry am I that neighbours we are not likely to be much longer.”

He glanced at me with an air of officious com-

miseration. I went to my study for the parcel of papers. It was in the drawer, where I had deposited it, and the seal was unbroken. Opening it, I handed the papers, one by one, to Apwood; meanwhile, his companion looked on with a swollen smile, gently stroking his double chin with the palm of his hand.

"Ten papers," I said, as I counted them off; "one, two—they are not in order," I observed, "but that's no matter. Nine, ten, eight, seven, five, six, four."

"Where is number three?" asked Crawlde, in a grave, emphatic voice. "Where is number three?"

"Did I not give it you? No? Then it must be amongst the other papers."

Apwood counted them over again.

"Number three absent!" exclaimed Crawlde, pompously.

"Impossible!" I cried. "One, two, four, five. Why, where can it be?"

We examined each separate paper carefully, but number three was not to be found.

"Number three absent!" reiterated Crawlde.

I hurried to my sitting-room, examined my

papers, ransacked the drawers, searched high and low. It was nowhere to be found.

"It was the certificate of my sister's marriage," observed Apwood. "It was torn, and mended with a strip of blue paper at the back; it is very conspicuous, owing to the blue colour."

I was of course much distressed, but was confident the paper was tied up with the other documents, and must be somewhere in the house.

"Examine them, Crawdle, once again," said Apwood, who appeared almost as much embarrassed as myself.

Crawdle uncrossed his legs, put on a dingy pair of spectacles, and told them off, in loud, nasal accents.

"One, two, four. Number three missing, gone, *non præsens*, not forthcoming!"

In great vexation, I rose to resume my search.

"Don't flurry yourself, sir," said Apwood, awkwardly. "Take your time, I beg. We will call or send again. I have the most implicit confidence in your integrity."

I did not answer, but, totally confounded, racked my brain to account satisfactorily for this unexpected loss.

Crawdle, taking off his spectacles, and carefully wiping them in the skirt of his coat, replaced them, or rather re-imbedded them, on his nose, and staring at me with a look of coarse suspicion that nearly procured him a sound box on the ear, said solemnly,—

“Here’s a mystery, an ugly mystery. The matter can’t rest here. I don’t budge till I witness the delivery of that concealed document.”

“How dare you, sir, mention the word ‘concealed’? If it is concealed, it is by your means. You are insupportably vulgar and insolent. Mr. Apwood,” I added, turning to him hastily, “Mr. Apwood, I appeal to your better feelings. You say that you place confidence in my honour, and I know that you have never had cause to do otherwise. I beg you to remove this man.”

Apwood, much confused, took Crawdle by the arm, and tried to pull him away. The latter grasped the seat of his chair with a hand on each side, and reiterated,—

“I don’t budge till I see that paper.”

“Nonsense,” cried Apwood. “It will all come right; don’t be unpleasant, pray.”

“Mr. Apwood, and you, Mr. Chauncey, late

M.P. for Meadshire, of Glenarvon House, but now an ex-M.P., of No Hall, Nowhere!—aye, of No Hall, Nowhere, if there's law or justice in the land!—I don't budge an inch! not an inch! I am Mr. Apwood's friend and adviser; he is in my hands. Hands off, Apwood, I say; you'll pinch me black and blue!"

Apwood, however, persevered, and, whispering some words in his ear, at length got him on his legs.

"With regard to this missing document," I resumed. "I will make all necessary search for it. Our house the night before last was entered by thieves, as you may learn from the police; my drawers were broken open, and my papers meddled with. Possibly the certificate fell out of the parcel, and has been mixed up with my letters; you must make allowance for the confusion and disorder caused by this circumstance."

Apwood bowed. Crawdle puffed out his cheeks to their fullest extent, and then letting them suddenly collapse, exclaimed:—

"Hoity toity, Mr. Chauncey! This is another pair of shoes entirely! I humbly ask your pardon.

I had not heard of the burglary until this blessed moment. Maybe the paper will turn up. We mustn't be hard upon him, Apwood, eh?"

And he nudged his friend in the ribs. Whether his change of manner was real or assumed, I cared not to inquire. The two men bowed and walked off; but again I thought I heard Crawdle's coarse chuckle in the passage outside, as Winifred, in the absence of the other servants, opened the street door to let them out.

As soon as they were gone, I again hastened to my room, and, with great anxiety, looked everywhere for the certificate, but all in vain. I seized my hat, and was setting forth to seek an immediate interview with my solicitors, when a message came from the Strand Hotel; the surgeon had sent for me.

On my arriving at the hotel, I found the physician had just preceded me. Vaughan's delirium had assumed a severer type, verging at times upon uncontrollable mania. Still it was strange that even in the wildest accesses of his disorder, there was coherence and method in his delusions; he was perpetually striving to reach his daughter, and vehemently battling with the obstacles his

diseased fancy summoned up before him. He would spring up in his bed and denounce enemies visible only to himself; he would appeal to us, not recognizing who we were, to come promptly to his aid. Sometimes, in his calmer moments, I spoke to him gently, and told him my name; he would seem perplexed, but after a fruitless effort to collect his thoughts upon the idea presented to him, would go off again into a confused, rambling soliloquy. I found, however, that though he did not recognize me, the mention of my name gave for a few moments a different turn to his thoughts; he would speak of me as an ill-used and persecuted man.

As the day advanced, the scene became distressing even to unconcerned spectators; but to me, who saw my best friend, the only friend in England on whom I could rely, torn and shaken to and fro by paroxysms of fierce delirium; to me, who knew so well the calm, stern beauty of that countenance, now congested with fever-heated blood, quivering with passions that, during a long and blameless life, he had made it his duty to curb and conquer; to me, upon whom those eyes, now blood-shot

and savage, had so lately shone with steady and reassuring affection ; to me, the spectacle was torture—the burden too heavy to bear.

In the evening the crisis came. Vaughan fell into a profound sleep. My agitation was great ; he might wake once more to be my friend and my guide amidst the troubles of mortal life ; eagerly did I watch his almost breathless slumbers. The nurse, moved by the intensity of my emotion, became gradually almost as anxious as myself. We hailed with pleasure the arrival of the medical men ; they remained a long time by the sufferer's bedside ; then I was summoned to another room, and listened with fixed and rigid countenance to the few words the physician had to tell me. I knew the moment he began to speak that I must expect the worst ; yet he would not have me despair ; great as had been the havoc made by the fever, and deep the prostration superinduced, it was possible, barely possible, that Vaughan might rally ; immediate stimulants must be administered upon his waking. The physician, a man not only of the most cultivated intellect, but with a tender and compassionate heart, noticed my wild and care-worn looks, and the disorder of

my manner. He spoke to me with the kindness of a brother, and softened the bitterness of my grief by words of deep, but manly sympathy, nor would he leave me until he had seen me take the refreshment I so much required.

It was late, and I wrote to Rosamund explaining the reason of my absence; then I resumed my place by the side of Vaughan. He still slept, calmly and sweetly as a young child. The lamp from the adjoining room shone through the half-opened door; the flush of fever had passed away; the countenance was very pale; his hands were crossed upon his breast: the motion of his breathing was almost indiscernible. I thought, after all, that if any one was fit for death it was that strong-hearted and energetic, yet patient, forgiving, self-depreciating man.

On a sudden my friend made a slight movement with his hands, and slowly opened his eyes; I leaned forwards, my heart beating audibly. The wild glare of delirium had faded from his eyes; the glance that met mine was calm and rational, though languid almost to death. Still looking at me, he said, gently and slowly,—

“Chauncey, I have seen my daughter.”

Then, as if fatigued by the effort, he once more relapsed into silence. The surgeon was at hand, and, with his aid, restoratives were cautiously administered; the effect upon the pulse was barely perceptible, but there was a slight improvement in the expression of his countenance.

I pressed his hand, and felt with joy that the pressure was returned. He looked round him slowly; a thousand thoughts appeared to throng into his mind, and, for a few seconds, distressed and perplexed him. Presently he grew once more calm; restoratives were again given to him, but he swallowed with difficulty.

By the glance Vaughan gave me, and the slight, quick movement of his lips, I saw that he wished to speak to me privately. The surgeon and nurse withdrew to a little distance; I bent my head down close to his. In faint words he said, or rather whispered,—

“Remember my daughter.”

With tears I promised to protect, comfort, and cherish her. He motioned with his hand, and I perceived a hair chain round his neck, to which was attached a small gold locket. I unclasped it, and, fastening it round my own neck,

promised I would give it to Edith. By his smile I saw that I had rightly anticipated his wishes. He bade me good-bye, with the smile still lingering on his face. Oppressed by a rush of miserable thoughts, I pressed his hand to my lips, and uttered a few words of passionate regret. "Who will be my friend when you are gone? Where shall I find your like?"

Vaughan gazed at me earnestly. A light beamed from his dying eyes, and taking my hand in his, with a last effort, he laid it on the Bible, by the side of his bed. The next instant the fingers relaxed, and his hand dropped upon the bed. I heard the surgeon whisper to the nurse; she sat down on a chair, threw her apron over her face, and sobbed aloud.

I gently closed my friend's eyes, that still appeared to gaze upon me with mysterious earnestness, and, taking his Bible with me, went home to tell my wife that all was over.

CHAPTER XV.

A DESERTED MANSION.

ABOUT a week had elapsed, and I was posting to Glenarvon alone, in my travelling carriage.

Strange that, to the man escaped from the anxieties and bustle of active life in a great city, the simplest objects of the country—the green fields and hedgerows, the river winding through the level plain, the coppice clothing the sides of the low hills, the tall elms now and then overhanging the dusty road, and shrouding it in pleasant gloom—soothe and tranquillize, at least for a time, the mind most harassed and most dejected.

The commoner features of a drive across England on a well-kept turnpike road, attracted and interested me. The narrow canal that ran parallel with us for a few hundred yards, with

its lazy barge drawn by a still lazier horse; gipsies, encamped on the common gazing after the receding carriage as if it were carrying off their lawful prey; the droves of cattle, and flocks of sheep, slowly crawling along the road, and stopping to drink at every puddle—the boy that drove them shouting, and his confederate dog barking, at the approach of horse or vehicle; and the stout yeoman, bringing up the rear in his old-fashioned gig, half dozing from the combined influence of leisurely travelling under a hot sun, and an early dinner with his brother farmers on market day; the pleasant roadside inn, now rarely met with, with its trim garden and shubberies, its ample stabling, and its arbour'd bowling-green; then, the peaceful country landscape, through which we wound for hours, penetrating into the heart of rural life, amidst orchards, meadows, cornfields, sheltered wooded nooks; no vestige of commercial traffic save when we passed through the tranquil streets of some sleepy country town, where the very dogs scarce troubled themselves to rise and bark at the whirling wheels of the carriage; all these familiar, nay, if you will, common-place objects, refreshed

and comforted me. I lay back in my carriage and quietly watched each variation of the changing landscape, as my carriage passed onwards over smooth roads, now ascending, now descending, across the fertile districts of the west.

Yet my mind was sore from recent heavy grief, disturbed by gathering dangers. I had buried my dear friend ; I had heard the cold earth fall upon his coffin ; I had returned home knowing that trials awaited me in which his thoughtful guidance would have proved a sufficing stay. It was essential I should hasten into the country and make inquiries far and near relative to Apwood's strange tale. But Edith Vaughan had been left in my hands by her father as a sacred charge ; I had promised him on his death-bed to protect, comfort, and cherish her. Rosamund's letter to her, written on the day when her father first fell ill, remained unanswered ; at first we expected she would answer it in person ; a room was prepared for her, but Edith neither wrote nor came.

It was now necessary to convey to her the deplorable intelligence of her father's death. How

was this to be done? I should have immediately started myself for Rouen, but the embarrassing aspect of my affairs, and the urgent need for action, rendered my stay in England a matter of the first moment.

It was at this juncture that my wife came to my aid with the impulsive generosity of her nature. She saw me bowed down by no common sorrow, harassed by no ordinary perplexity; she divined that even the irreparable loss I had sustained could not of itself account for the darkness that had settled on my mind. Coming to my side on the sofa, where I sat brooding with folded arms on the troubles that hemmed me in, and winding her arms round me with sweet and gentle solicitude, she asked me how she could help me? Would I trust her? Would I turn her love to some useful purpose?

Little do men, beloved by women, amiable, soft, yielding, submissive, know the precious worth of the love of a woman strong of heart and firm of will. I felt it then. I knew then the privilege I possessed, and might, under happier circumstances, have never lost; the privilege of being loved by a pure-minded, tender-hearted,

yet unfettered, unsubservient wife. I knew it then; I remember it now with the keen anguish of wasted happiness, and of gifts perverted and for ever lost. I leaned my cheek against hers that was moistened by the tears that came to my relief, and told her all my sorrows, and all my fears; her deep blue eyes shone calmly into mine, strengthening my anxious heart.

In few emphatic words, clasping my hand firmly in hers, Rosamund urged me to be hopeful and steadfast, and told me of her resolve to be herself the bearer of those bitter tidings to the poor orphan at Rouen.

To her the Continent was not a strange country, as it was to many at that time; she had lived abroad for years, and Winifred had also travelled. She made light of the journey. The interview with Edith would indeed be far more serious; but that, too, for my sake, she would encounter without shrinking, and strive to soothe and sustain her in her affliction. For the other matter—the strange tale of Apwood, and those in league with him—it was of course to her incomprehensible and perplexing; but come what may, though we might lose fortune, position, influence, we

should not be destitute—we should not, comparatively speaking, be poor—and with hearts knit together in true affection, we might still be happy; happier, perhaps, than when our worldly fortunes were bright and fair.

A few words passed touching the incident that had caused both of us so much pain; I mean the reading of the letters my wife had placed in her desk. I pressed my wife to give some assurance that she not only had forgiven me, but was convinced that I had acted for the best and deserved her confidence as fully as of old.

“Be content,” she said, pressing her lips upon my forehead; “my trust is reviving. It cannot return suddenly: time and patience are needed. But my heart yearns towards you tenderly; let this comfort and sustain you.”

The serenity that interview imparted to my mind lingered with me for days after we had bade each other farewell; Rosamund departing for Rouen, myself for Glenarvon.

I was travelling then in my own carriage. The day advanced, and misty vapours dimmed the surrounding landscape; we were now on the chalk, and vegetation grew less rich and luxuriant;

the air was keener, the murmur of distant brooks reached the ear when we stopped to change horses; we passed under the interlacing branches of beech and ash, and then emerged upon broad and spacious downs over which the setting sun shed slanting rays of ruddy light.

The mail from London overtook us. My postilion, with the emulation usual at such junctures, urged his horses to greater speed, and for a hundred yards or so, my carriage and the coach ran side by side, at a rapid rate. The foam-flecked horses, participating in the excitement, stepped out bravely, and broke into a gallop.

At length my postilion, his conscience rebuking him, drew rein and slackened speed. The mail rattled by, the flints on the road flying to right and left; a fat face, protruding from the window, caught my attention; it was Crawdle's. The moment our eyes met, he withdrew his night-capped head abruptly. The sight of that man annoyed me; it was no doubt a coincidence, his travelling down to Meadshire on the same day as myself; there was nothing in it; yet the growing consciousness that I was beset by enemies

leagued together from various motives, rendered me suspicious and uneasy. Drawing down the blinds of my carriage, to keep out the blaze of sunset in which we were enveloped, I leaned back in my carriage, and took refuge from desponding thoughts in slumber.

The aspect of a country house uninhabited for several months save by the servants in charge, is cold and dreary to the casual visitor, and still more so to the owner himself. Due notice had indeed been given of my intended visit, and some attempt made to impart an air of comfort to the rooms intended for my use. The long, well-filled bookcases in the library were muffled in white sheet as a protection from dust, but the Turkey carpet was down, and a large wood fire blazed on the old-fashioned hearth; though summer had barely passed, the sight did one good in that silent, lonely mansion. A bedroom above, to which there was a private staircase, winding up an ancient turret, was prepared for my reception. Elsewhere all was confusion and discomfort. In the drawing-room the chairs and sofas, with their gay damask furniture, were enveloped in sober coverings, ready to emerge from

this chrysalis condition at some happier period. My footsteps fell drearily upon the uncarpeted floors, awakening echoes in far-off passages. In Rosamund's favourite oriel window stood her table and low quaint bookcase, with the high-backed Elizabethan chair she was wont to sit in, not for comfort but from a sense of duty, in order not to spoil the picturesque effect of the room. Her little greyhound followed me into the room, and ran whining round the chair, as if he were unable to comprehend why she was not at Glenarvon as well as myself.

In the great hall, workmen had recently been busy. The walls had been newly painted, and my ancestors suspended round me looked forth from their dark canvas, with an expression of countenance more grim than ever, as if the smell of paint annoyed them. My cousin's rubicund face regarded me with a deprecating air; he seemed conscious of having done me wrong.

In the gallery I noticed the portrait of the lady, whose likeness to Apwood Rosamund had detected; I wondered now that I had ever doubted the relationship. It was his sister; the initials L. A. were on the back; it had been sent home

from abroad with a quantity of my cousin's effects, after his decease.

The great bell rang for the servants' supper and reverberated through the deserted house with stunning clangour; the watch-dog bayed in the far-off stable-yard a melancholy response.

Before retiring to rest, I had a long talk with David, once my cousin's butler, and now mine. The old man, in discoursing of his old master's character and way of life, dropped his voice to a respectful whisper, as if he rather apprehended my cousin would overhear him.

It seemed that David knew nothing save by hearsay. About the month of August, 18—, his master had left for foreign parts, and there was a rumour in the village that a lady accompanied him; but whether it was the beginning or the end of the month, he could not now be sure; Mr. Malpus, the late steward, who accompanied him, would be able to tell me. Of a marriage he had never heard, and, for his part, thought my cousin was incapable of disgracing himself by marrying a person of low station.

"No, my poor master was not so bad as that. Master might have gone astray—many a gentleman

had before him—but to marry? It was not to be thought of. It was clean contrary to my good master's principles. It was shocking to hear tell of such a thing, leastwise at his time of life. No, master was too well brought up for that! Surely—surely, sir, you don't believe it?"

So spoke David, rubbing his lean old hands together in considerable excitement, whilst his wrinkled face reddened like a well-kept winter pippin, up to the very roots of his white hair.

I retired to rest without having obtained much information. The mention of Malpus by no means tended to give me comfort. A discarded steward, who bore me a grudge, was little likely to be friendly to my cause. Yet I thought it as well to have an interview, however repugnant to my feelings, and ascertain, so far as I could, his views and intentions. A message was therefore sent, requesting him to call on me the following morning.

CHAPTER XVI.

AN AFFECTIONATE COUSIN.

"SIR, I insist upon your leaving the house. I do not recognize you either as Mr. Ferris's or Mr. Apwood's agent; I regard you as an impertinent intermeddler."

"Mr. Chauncey, I am no intermeddler with a worthy man's landed property, as some gentlemen are. I represent Mr. Apwood. I formally demand a certain document entrusted to your charge, which you have neglected to deliver, and refuse to account for. I do not budge, except by compulsion. No, not a foot, except by compulsion."

Such were the words passing between Crawdle and myself on the following morning.

Malpus had duly responded to my summons; scarcely had I finished breakfast when David

knocked at my library door, and announced his arrival. He was shown in, but to my infinite disgust, the corpulent form of Crawdle followed behind him. My countenance no doubt expressed the annoyance I felt at this intrusion; Malpus, in his drawling nasal voice, explained that Mr. Crawdle and himself had met by pure accident at the entrance door, Crawdle having business of his own to transact with me. "It was quite a providence, for it had saved the good old man, your butler, the trouble of going twice to answer the door-bell."

With some impatience, I had requested Mr. Crawdle to retire, and he had then broken out on the subject of the missing certificate, with a pompous impertinence that had drawn from me the words in the preceding page.

"Never," he continued, taking advantage of my evident disinclination to proceed to extremities,—“never have I witnessed so ugly a transaction; never have I been so shocked, though whilst coroner for the district my feelings have been often tried; never have I come plump upon such a nasty business. Positively, I feel as if I had swallowed an ounce

of ipecacuanha! My inside is revolutionized! Faugh!"

The animal fanned his large white cheeks with a cotton pocket-handkerchief. Meanwhile, Malpus, seated on a chair in a corner of the room, rocked slowly to and fro, rolling his eyes first towards Crawlde, then towards myself, and uttering exclamations of a pathetic character, such as, "Ah, well, well! Only to think! Oh dear! oh dear! Now, don't ye say that, Mr. Crawlde! I knew his mother from a girl!"

I seized the bell-rope, and was about to pull it angrily, when the fat surgeon raised himself, with as much promptitude as possible, from the sofa on which he had coolly seated himself, and, sidling up to me, said, in a lower tone of voice,—

"Ay, ay, sir. Since it's your pleasure I should go, go I must. But one word, sir—only one word more. Have you any offer to make, sir?" He looked at me with a broad vulgar stare meant to be imposing; I asked him what he meant.

"Mean, sir? Why, what I say. Have you an offer to make? An offer in cash or land,

personalty or realty, either or both, to the parties claiming the estate. Eh, sir?"

I regarded him with contempt, and did not deign a reply; Malpus groaned audibly, and the surgeon reluctantly waddled out of the room. He stopped at the door, winked at me confidentially, and beckoned me to follow him; not disposed to be further trifled with, I did so, but it was to see him out of the house, and direct my servants to expedite his movements if he lingered. However, in the great hall, through which we had to pass, Crawdle again halted and, wiping his forehead, said, in a tone of voice rather less impudent than heretofore,—

"I speak as a friend, sir, I do, upon my honour. Don't ye wish you were clear of all this bother? Wouldn't you be glad of a quiet snooze again, without any more worry? Make an offer, sir, make an offer. Who knows but I mightn't lift you out of the hot water you're kicking in, just as I could a fly out of a milk-jug: who knows, sir, who knows?"

He again came nearer, lowering his voice to a sort of grunt, and enveloping me, as he ap-

proached, in an atmosphere of brandy and water. I drew back, and calling for David, desired him to show Mr. Crawdle out. The fat man stared at me with coarse familiarity, clapped his hat on his head, wheeled slowly round, and swaying to and fro along the slippery oak floor supported on his huge knotty stick, he made his exit.

I have often since regretted that I did not take advantage of this opening. Possibly the man had his price, and might have been bought over. But my spirit was then too haughty to stoop to a creature whom I despised.

Returning to Malpus, I took a chair near him and explained my object in sending for him. He sighed audibly, and commenced slowly shaking his head like a Chinese mandarin of serious views. At length he replied,—

“Mr. Herbert, Mr. Herbert, I’m in a sad strait; though no doubt it’s all for my good, and I don’t repine. No, by no manner of means, I don’t repine; I bear my burden with a grateful heart. But it is a sore trial to me to witness your affliction, Mr. Herbert. And me not able to help you, —no, not able to put out my little finger to help

you, Mr. Herbert. For I wouldn't tell a lie, Mr. Herbert; no, not for a sackful of sovereigns. It goes against my conscience to lie, and always did, Mr. Herbert; though I knew your mother well, and remember you from a boy. Yes, a sprightly little chap you were, and trod on my gouty toe of purpose, whenever you came nigh me. But then you was but a boy, and I don't bear malice; for 'twas all for my good. And your mother, too—ah! she was a good woman; yes, she was. Ah, well, well!”

So the old man went on, in droning accents and with dejected countenance. I pressed him to give me full particulars of my cousin's marriage, but groans and sighs were his only rejoinder. All would come out in due course. He couldn't lie; 'twas all against the grain for him to lie. No, not even for me; though he forgave me long ago, and loved me, as in duty bound, and would love me even if I kicked him out of the house. Yes, that he would.

I had no inclination to go quite so far as this, but certainly felt thoroughly disgusted with my old friend. He was as wily as a fox, and nothing could I get out of him but groans and lamenta-

tions, and strong assurances of his respect for my mother's memory, and of his tender regard for myself.

"Bless you, Mr. Herbert," were his last words, as he took his leave; "bless you. Sure, when I see the light fall on your forehead, I think I see your mother. You've got her eyebrows—yes, you've got her eyebrows. Ah, well! well! Try for a clear conscience, Mr. Herbert; that'll bring comfort in old age. That's what keeps me straight, and helps me forward. Try for that, Mr. Herbert. You've many gifts. A comely young man; a tall, comely young man, very like your worthy mother. But don't be puffed up. Well! well! we shall meet again. Bless you, Mr. Herbert, bless you."

I was glad to mount my horse, and ride away in the direction of my cousin Ferris; the morning's work had been tedious and trying; a rapid gallop refreshed and cheered me. In half an hour the dusky plantations surrounding Villa Lombardo were reached, and opening the spiked entrance gate, I walked my horse slowly up the drive to the house.

"Oh, cousin Herbert, what a delightful, though

exceedingly startling surprise ! ” cried Isabella Ferris. She was standing on the lawn, clad in a long cloak, with a large black feather in her hat, and strongly resembled a female bandit in appearance ; but, in point of fact, she was occupied in the peaceable task of uprooting daisies with a long rake. As soon as I dismounted, Isabella, leaning on her daisy rake, bent her dark eyes upon me, and exclaimed—with an eagerness that disconcerted me—“ Oh, how I have longed for this day ! The time has at length arrived when I shall be able to show you my dear lake, my little Loch Katrine I call it. Come, cousin Herbert, come, ‘ its soft murmuring sounds sweet as if a sister’s voice reproved ; ’ not to mention the humming of the gnats and midges ! ”

“ Miss Ferris, I have seen your lake.”

“ Well, and is not it deliciously gloomy ? ”

“ To tell the honest truth I never saw such a cut-throat hole in my life ! I almost shudder to think of it.”

I was afraid I had gone too far, but Isabella was in ecstasies.

“ That’s delightful ! I shall repeat it to papa and my sister. They call my lake ‘ cockney.’ ”

Now, whoever heard of anything 'cockney' making one shudder?"

At that moment I perceived Ferris's gig, as yellow as ever, glimmering through the laurels that lined the carriage-drive at the entrance-gate.

To my surprise, Ferris, on seeing me on the lawn, threw the reins to his groom, and, springing out, made off in another direction; I turned appealingly to Isabella, and asked what it meant.

"Oh, Mr. Chauncey, how should I know? It's all a mystery; but, to my mind, mystery is very much pleasanter than matter-of-fact."

"Meantime, Miss Isabella, I want to speak to your father," was my rather testy rejoinder.

"Cousin, cousin, have patience. Papa has a warm regard for you. 'Tis true he shuns you, but that's an outward form; his heart I know is with you."

Not attending to these representations, I hastened after Ferris. Passing down a path through the shrubberies, I caught sight of his cinnamon-coloured macintosh, fluttering in the breeze. He tried to escape into the kitchen-garden, but I seized the skirt of his macintosh before he was

well through the door, and Ferris turned at bay.

“So you will come to me, cousin Chauncey; you will worry me and run me down? What’s the use, if we are both of us ruined together—eh, cousin, eh?”

“All I want to ask you is this,” I rejoined; “are you, or are you not, in league with these men? Are you one of the conspirators in this infamous plot? Come, say yes or no.”

“Dear, dear, what a man it is! Don’t you know I’m your friend—your true friend?”

“Why, you are trying to rob me of my estate! How can you be my friend?”

“Very easily. Don’t you see I’m trying to help you, but can only do it ‘on the sly?’ But you’ll spoil all if you come bothering here. Oh dear, what’s that rustling in the bushes?”

I saw the old man was nervous and flurried. Perhaps, after all, he was not my enemy; perhaps I had better put some confidence in him; so I added,—

“What do you advise me to do?”

“Advise you to do? Why, go abroad. I told you the same thing a fortnight ago. Go abroad.

Get out of our reach. Oh dear, dear, wasn't that a ring at the front door?"

The old man walked, or rather trotted, by my side, at a quick pace, glancing from right to left, in a state of extreme discomfort.

"I tell you," he resumed, "get out of our reach."

"But why, sir,—why?"

"Oh dear—oh dear, I don't know; but do get out of our reach. D'ye suppose I know everything that is going on? No, no; but I smell treachery—I scent roguery."

Here a thrush suddenly flew across the path, and my excited little cousin leaped into the air, in an agony of alarm.

"Now, do go; do leave me; do have some regard for my welfare, and for your own," he exclaimed, after having a little recovered from his trepidation.

"But do you believe in our cousin Jeffry's marriage? Do you think you are rightfully owner of Glenarvon?"

"Oh, don't bother me, please; I know nothing at all about it. Let matters take their course; I'll do my best at the proper time. Meantime,

I shall be more at my ease, if I don't see your face again; I shall, indeed. No offence, but it's a fact; I can't abide the sight of you, good coz. I can't, upon my honour."

I turned to go, wearied with the old man's folly; but, he added, in a spasmodic whisper,—

"Harkee, cousin, harkee; have you turned off all your servants?"

"All except Winifred. We trust her much, my wife especially."

Ferris retreated backward into a laurel bush, in a paroxysm of disgust.

"Trust her much! oh dear—oh dear! Wasn't she with Lady Annandale? and isn't Lady Annandale a Littlecot? and aren't they all pulling together? Trust nobody, cousin—trust nobody."

Clutching my arm till he made me wince, with rolling eyes, and his face a wilderness of wrinkles, the old gentleman put his mouth to my ear, and whispered,—

"Don't let her darken your doors a day longer. I oughtn't to say so; I may do myself a mischief: but blood is thicker than water. Get rid of the hussey at once. She's too clever

by half, and I don't like her, cousin Chauncey, I don't like her. Oh dear, oh dear, what's that?"

It was only a squirrel rustling in the bushes; but my cousin, horribly alarmed, gave me another grip on the arm, and once more took to his heels.

I walked to the stables, and got my horse, but had hardly mounted, when Ferris's shrill voice reached me out of some obscure back window of the house.

"Come here—come here, cousin; close under the wall there. So. Just one word in your ear. Don't ye go home by Highbury Down; there's a Blue meeting at Smelterstown, and if you go that way you'll meet the procession. Sir Claude Cockayne is the Blue candidate, a donkey on two legs! I won't vote for him, I can tell you! But, there—you'll find it unpleasant to meet them. The Blues don't love you, cousin, I can tell you. Slip home by Nettlecombe Lane, cousin—slip home by the lane. Bye, bye, cousin—bye, bye!"

As he uttered these words in his shrill, cracked voice, a white handkerchief fluttered from an

upper window, and Miss Isabella plaintively murmured farewell.

I had never been in the habit of going out of my way to shun slight dangers or insignificant annoyances. Repeated misfortunes and disappointments may have made me since that time more wary; but it was not so then. Ferris's well-meant caution stimulated me rather to confront than to elude the procession. Vexed as I had been by secret and cowardly assailants, the prospect of meeting a multitude openly hostile was almost refreshing.

I quietly cantered my horse in the direction of Highbury Down; this was my shortest way home. The breeze blew fresh across the common, perfumed with gorse and heather. It was pleasant to feel my horse bound under me over the springy turf. Yet sad thoughts recurred to me on passing the outskirts of the common, where my duel with Hartley was to have come off, and where I had first met William Vaughan. Had it not been for me those two men might now have been alive and well. Yes, it was possible, and the thought oppressed and troubled me.

But now a confused murmur met my ear, and

from the lane emerged a long train of mounted yeomen, interspersed with some of the leading gentry, and followed by two or three open carriages.

There had been a great meeting of Tories at Smelterstown, and a body of freeholders and tenant farmers were accompanying Sir Claude Cockayne, the new candidate for Meadshire, to his home at Highbury Park. Reining in my horse, I encountered my former constituents with calm self-possession, ready to return courtesy for courtesy, or meet incivility with passive contempt.

My face was too well known not to attract immediate notice. The foremost riders passed me with looks of scowling insolence. Soon, however, as the word passed from mouth to mouth that "Chauncey" was coming, an angry hubbub of voices filled the air; the foremost files wheeled round, whilst those bringing up the rear spread out, and extended across the common in front of me. Thus I was surrounded by some two hundred mounted men, who, emboldened by numbers and heated by drink, gave vent to their phrenzy by yells and outcries, each moment louder and more offensive.

Several gentlemen were amongst them, most of

them brother magistrates, but they either would not or could not restrain the violence of these angry men. "Turncoat!" "Rat!" "Wolf in sheep's clothing!" were some of the mildest appellations flung at my head; whilst coarse allusions to the pending lawsuit respecting my title to Glenarvon, showed how actively my enemies had been at work to damage my position in my own neighbourhood. Some young men, connected I believe with the Hartley estate, were especially annoying and impertinent, styling me an impostor and swindler. I still kept my temper, and, pushing forwards, made my way, with some difficulty, through the noisy phalanx that encircled me. Sir Claude Cockayne was in an open carriage, in a waistcoat of light blue satin, and a new wig from London. He was never otherwise than civil; it was his policy through life. At school he had thanked his schoolmaster for birching him, and when well pummelled by a boy rather smaller than himself, made him a present of a pocket Horace neatly bound. When he saw me, he gracefully waved his hand and smiled, with an air of tender interest, but did not offer to remonstrate with his furious followers.

Behind him followed a carriage I well knew. It was Sir Hugh Littlecot's. His servants, in their white liveries, were on the box; he, himself, was not inside; only some gentlemen residing near Severn Banks. At that moment one of the cavalcade, rather nearer my own rank and station than most of those shouting round me, yelled out that I had "sold my party;" I singled him out, rode close up to him, and said, in the hearing of all near us, that he was "a liar." He slunk back, but the clamour increased, and some of the younger men deliberately spurred their horses against mine, in the hope of dismounting me. I was well mounted, but had only a light cane in my hand. The crowd was dense, and every moment more inclined to violence; my situation was very uncomfortable.

At that instant, however, a stout, broad-faced man, mounted on a large, powerful horse, rode right into the *mêlée*, and cleaving his way, like a strong swimmer through the waves, pushed up to me, and making his heavy riding-whip describe a few circles in the air, drove back the crowd, crying out, in a rich and sonorous voice,—

"Stand back, gentlemen, stand back! What?"

D'ye call this fair play? Come, clear the road, and let him pass, or I'll know the reason why!"

It was Paul Muckleworth. The tide turned directly, and the cavalcade re-formed, and pushed on, leaving me free to pass. Paul accompanied me some fifty yards, until the horsemen and carriages had gone by; he said nothing, and kept his eyes averted from me. When we were clear of the procession, he turned to go; I cried out, "Come, Paul, let us shake hands. Let us part friends." Muckleworth turned his face from me, but I could see he was getting redder and redder. At length, he suddenly wheeled round, clutched me by the hand, till he made my finger-joints crack, and exclaimed,—

"I must do it, Herbert, though I've sworn I wouldn't; just once. But I can't do it again; no, I can't, indeed. Why, Herbert man, thou hast almost broke my heart. Such a fine young fellow, full of pluck, who fought so good a fight for true Blue! what a pity! what a pity! Well, 'tis no use talking. There, one more shake—one more shake. Maybe you'll repent, and mend your ways; if you do, my arms will be open to receive you. But I mustn't linger. Cockayne

(confound the fellow), Cockayne for ever! and down with the Rads!"

So saying, Paul once more grasped my hand, and, shaking a couple of large tears from his eyes, galloped after the cavalcade.

CHAPTER XVII.

SHADOWS OF THE PAST.

“ DEAREST HERBERT,

“ In my last, I had only time to tell you of our safe arrival at Rouen, and must now shortly describe my interview with poor Edith. I had dreaded it so much, that it was less trying when it came than I had anticipated. Only think, she never received our first letter, announcing her father’s illness! Winifred is sure it must have been intercepted by the person who annoyed Edith so much by writing foolish love-letters, and serenading her at night, of whom you know she complained to her father.

“ When I arrived Edith had received my second letter with worse tidings of her father; she was just starting for England in the hope of not being too late. So she was not wholly unprepared.

But I don't think she quite realized her loss at first, or else her nature is wonderfully different from mine. Pale she was as marble and her features fixed and rigid, but there was no violent emotion. She asked us several questions, speaking slowly and composedly. I say 'us' because, following your advice, I brought Mr. Parker Simpson, the English clergyman, with me. 'Twas not till I produced the parcel, that her firmness at all gave way; she tore it open with the quickness of lightning, and, rising, walked to the window.

"You told me what was in it; a watch, a locket, and a few other things of her father's. The moment her eyes glanced at these familiar objects, a spasm darted through her frame; she sank upon the floor, her face hid in her hands. We rushed forwards, thinking she had fainted; no; her bodily strength had failed, but that was all. We raised her from the ground, and placed her in a chair. She thanked us; then turning to the clergyman, whispered, 'Pray with me.' You know, dearest Herbert, I am not much accustomed to praying, except at church, or morning and evening, by my bedside; so, feeling awkward, I left them together. After

some time Mr. Simpson went home, and poor Edith lay down in her bedroom; I sat up with her the first half of the night, and Winifred the other; it was very, very sad. Still it is a blessing she is so calm and strong-minded; I should have gone mad, I am sure.

“Early yesterday morning, Edith was so ill that we sent for a doctor. He would not give her any medicine, but brought a Sister of Charity who nursed Mr. Vaughan when very unwell at Rouen, a little time since. Sœur Angélique was a favourite with both of them. The moment Edith saw her, she half rose from the bed, and, throwing her arms round her, burst into tears, and so did the Sœur, and, indeed, all of us; I think since then she has been a little better. I wish I could be more of a comfort to her; but I will do my best, not only for her sake, but because I know you wish it.

“How I envy you at beloved Glenarvon! You may as well get my boudoir in order for me, and take care the bay mare be exercised every day; and please tell the gardener to cover over the geraniums these frosty nights. I suppose I shall be able to join you in a week or so. The Parker

Simpsons are very kind to Edith, though Mr. Parker Simpson is a dreadfully solemn-looking man; perhaps, in a house of mourning, it is natural he should be. And now good-bye, and believe me to be,

“Your ever affectionate wife,

“ROSAMUND.”

The same day I received the above letter, notice of an action of ejectment was served upon me, on the part of my cousin Ferris, who claimed the estates of Glenarvon on the ground that Jeffry's will was invalid, and the deed of settlement revoked in that will consequently good; by the deed of settlement the estate would follow the male line, and devolved upon my cousin Ferris.

My dear wife, though forewarned of the danger in store for us, could not bring herself to believe that my property could actually be torn from my grasp, and we ourselves driven into the world—friendless and homeless; she evidently looked forwards to a life of undisturbed enjoyment in her favourite Glenarvon.

Messrs. Ruffhead and Co., my solicitors, were

in frequent correspondence with me, and in one of their letters informed me of an important fact—no entry corresponding with the marriage certificate of Lucy Apwood had been discovered in the register book of the church at St. Pierre, Guernsey. It was a gleam of satisfactory intelligence. But my gratification was damped by a postscript in Ruffhead's own handwriting; they had not yet sent their own clerk to examine the book, and nothing could be known for certain until this was done.

I resolved to take the once-a-week steamer to Guernsey, and examine the register book myself. From Guernsey I could proceed to Havre and Rouen, returning to England with Rosamund, and perhaps Edith Vaughan as well.

I passed twenty-four hours at St. Pierre, Guernsey; though, had I had my will, I should have quitted the island in a couple of hours, my business there being soon completed; but there was no boat to Havre till next day. I say my business was soon completed, and unsatisfactorily enough too. On waiting upon the clergyman, I found he had been newly appointed, and the place was quite strange to him; he referred

me to the churchwarden, Mr. Grittles, who had charge of the books and papers connected with the church.

I marched off to Mr. Grittles; he was a Londoner, by birth and education, improved by a thin, and, truth to say, rather impure French varnish. Mr. Grittles kept a large general shop, did a good stroke of business, and was a great man in those parts. He cultivated a pair of irregular moustaches, and smoked cigars casually during the day; ill-natured people said that Grittle's face was symptomatic of dirt, impudence and duplicity, but ill-natured people will say anything.

I asked Mr. Grittles about the marriage register book; but of books and documents Mr. Grittles personally took no note himself.

"You see, sir," he observed, knocking off the ash of his cigar, "I leave the books to my young man, Louis Duprez, a converted papist, sir, and a very valuable fellow. Books are books; anybody can take care of them. My province is the moral one. Yes, sir, the moral one: I look after the parson. *Voyez, mon ami*"—Mr. Grittles was fond of throwing in a French word now

and then—"what's everybody's business, is nobody's business. My province is to keep the parson straight. Have you never heard of the great 'soup-plate row?' No? I am surprised. We had a christening to come off. 'Twas Louis Duprez' eldest. Would you believe it? The parson objected to use a cracked soup-plate full of indifferently clean water for the ceremony! 'Rank Popery!' quoth I. And sounded the alarm far and near. We held meetings, and memorialized the Bishop. Yes, sir, we badgered the reverend gent, not a little. At last he cut and run altogether. A good riddance! At present we've a tame parson. Leastways, so I think; and if he ain't, why, I must tackle him, that's all! *Voilà tout!*" And Mr. Grittles winked his eye with a singularly satyr-like expression of countenance, and sent a long thin volume of smoke out of one corner of his mouth.

I interrogated the "valuable young fellow," Louis Duprez, on the subject of the marriage register book. Louis, though a converted papist, did not strike me as a pleasant-looking young man. He was forty, if he was a day; a buff-complexioned half-caste, and, like his worthy

master, smelling abominably of tobacco. I could get little out of him; he jabbered French with indistinct volubility, and an outlandish accent; he affected not to comprehend English, though only five minutes before I had heard him jauntily conversing with a customer in that language; as for the register book, of course I should see it; but he was very slow in finding it; I was obliged to quicken his movements, by slipping some silver into his hand. The lean fingers closed on the coin convulsively, and, beckoning me into a small parlour or office at the back of the shop, he presently produced the book.

It was old, decayed, and battered; the entries, however, seemed to have been made with more regularity than was usual at the period. I carried back my researches the number of years requisite, Louis standing by my side. Who I was he probably either knew or suspected, though I endeavoured to look unconcerned.

Presently, however, I made a discovery that tried my self-possession and filled me with vague uneasiness. A certain page was torn out, and, assuming Apwood's statement as to the date of the marriage correct, upon that page must have been

entered the particulars of the marriage, and the signatures of the parties.

Meanwhile, Louis Duprez' black eyes were fixed upon me, with that "gloating" expression peculiar to the half-caste. Either he was apprehensive I was about to tear out another page, or rightly suspected I was interested in the page that was gone. I prudently avoided committing myself by mentioning any name, or asking too many questions; my solicitors could make requisite inquiries all in good time. I learned however that during the last month more than one person had paid visits to Mr. Grittles' shop, for the purpose of examining the register. There appeared to be no memoranda relating to the entries on the missing page, and it was by no means clear at what particular time the page was abstracted.

Louis rolled his gloating eyes, and, in rapid French, with a horrible accent, protested his conviction that the page had been stolen by a tall man, in a white great-coat, who appeared to be the servant of some English milord, and could not speak one word of French; he had been left alone with the book one "petit moment" while

Louis rushed into the shop to attend a customer. The story was vague, and I bade farewell to Pierre, the converted papist, with a strong conviction on my mind that he was a deliberate liar, and not likely to confer much lustre on the Protestant faith.

Without making any remark to the great champion of orthodoxy, Grittles, on this practical proof of the accuracy of his assertion, that "anybody could take care of books," I walked off to my hotel, and wrote forthwith to my solicitors on the subject. I slept that night at St. Pierre, but before starting for Havre next morning, received a letter from Rosamund:—

"Perhaps, dear Herbert, you will be surprised at my writing a long letter just before we expect to meet; but I think it will be happier for both of us, if I say what is on my mind at once. Dear Herbert, I have been troubled and vexed, and I think I have some cause. To be sure, you consider me over-sensitive, and possibly I am; but for that very reason, if you love me, you should deal tenderly with my infirmity, and spare me trials, light to some, but to me heavy indeed!

Mine is no selfish, torpid, callous heart. I suffer because I love.

“To what am I referring? Edith is rather better, and came yesterday to my room to see if everything was comfortable; I was out, but Winifred was there; she showed Edith your miniature, and asked if she had seen it before? Edith answered, ‘Yes.’ Now, how could that be? You gave the miniature to me after the Vaughans left England, and said, in giving it, that it had never left your desk since our marriage. I was puzzled, and asked Edith how she had seen it? To be brief; I learnt that evening—not from my husband, but from the lips of a young girl whom he had made his confidant, in preference to his own tried and loving wife—the miserable story of Ada Littlecot.

“You will say that, being Ada’s friend, it was from her she learnt it. But that is not so. The bare fact of breaking off the marriage she heard, indeed, from Ada—the vague report that you had not acted well, that, too, she knew before; but all the little incidents—all the painful details—the sad immediate results—she heard them from you. Well, you offered to tell me all when

you read the anonymous letters—that is true; but of what worth are confessions torn piecemeal from an unwilling heart? As for me, what did I do? I spurned, as you will bear me witness, the whispered calumnies of those letters. And why? because I thought them calumnies? Not wholly so. Rather because I had confidence in your love—wished the past to be blotted out.

“But your conduct to Miss Littlecot—has it kindled my displeasure? You will exclaim, ‘It is impossible, for I did all for your sake.’ Well, that would satisfy most women—might have satisfied me, for I loved you, and in the blindness of my love would doubtless have thought lightly of the fault. But now, after so many, many months, to hear the tale narrated in cold blood, and find it was kept back from me, and confided to another! This is a bitter and trying blow.

“Think over it, my husband; put yourself in my position; feel for me; and meet me, I will not say with contrition, for I desire to look up to you with reverence, and not in the least to abase you—but with pity, with confidence,

with tender regret. When, indeed, will you truly put trust in me? Ah, when, indeed?"

Harassed as I was by many cares, this letter at first angered me; it seemed cruel to add to my troubles, and pour fresh bitterness into my cup. A wife's noblest function was to soothe the wounded spirit, and raise the sinking heart of the man she ought to love best on earth. Was Rosamund doing this?

Such thoughts possessed me, as, seated on the deck of a small steamer cleaving the calm blue waters at a rapid pace, I gazed sometimes on the letter in my hand, sometimes on the rocky coasts of Guernsey and Jersey lying cloudlike on the horizon.

By degrees my displeasure cooled down. Perhaps I had ground for complaint. Yet look back, I said to myself, to the critical time—the painful, humiliating time, when you broke your faith with the poor girl now dead. Had I nothing to answer for, not merely to Ada and her friends, but to Rosamund, whom I had made an innocent participator in my own crime, if crime it was? But Rosamund did not urge this point; she complained rather

that I had not confided all to her after our marriage. Well, it would have grieved her to know the truth; but was that the reason I had been silent? Conscience answered, "No, not quite so." Rather, you shrank from lowering yourself in your wife's eyes.

In this way I mused upon the past, vaguely, uncertainly, coming to no exacter conclusion than this—if Rosamund was needlessly susceptible and jealous, I had erred more deeply; I was not the person to complain; my duty was to bear rebuffs in patience.

It was late in the evening, and a drizzling rain was falling when I reached Rouen. The oil-lamps in the crooked old streets flared through the muggy atmosphere, mere blots of ineffectual light. The circumstances were not cheerful; the place was strange to me, the weather depressing. I was going to a house, the master of which, my best friend, was dead, and his daughter steeped in deepest grief; I was going to a house, where, instead of meeting my kind and loving wife, I should encounter a wife vexed, jealous, and indignant.

However, arming myself with a kind of com-

posed, but not ill-tempered stolidity, I rang the bell, obtained admittance, and entered one of the sitting-rooms on the ground floor. It was a room barely furnished; in fact, rather like a billiard-room without a billiard-table, used for the reception of casual visitors. I waited there a minute or two, my servant making a great fuss, first, with the porter about the charge for bringing the luggage, next, with the French maid for not showing "master" upstairs at once, and finding a slight difficulty in making himself understood, in consequence of his entire ignorance of the language.

In the midst of the hubbub came a sudden lull; a sweet, musical voice allayed the storm. My composure was a little shaken, but, throwing my cloak round me, I stood in the middle of the room, and endeavoured to maintain a dignified demeanour; the door was quietly opened, and in the darkness I felt my wife's kisses on my cheek, and heard her whisper in my ear words of forgiveness and loving-kindness.

CHAPTER XVIII.

A FORTNIGHT AT ROUEN.

AT Rouen we remained some days. My presence in England was not essential, and after the sorrows and anxieties of the last four weeks, there was a feeling of repose in sojourning in a strange city, unmolested and unknown. Besides, I had not forgotten my promise to William Vaughan; never more than now would his daughter need comfort, guidance, and protection. Edith was in a state of great prostration of mind and body; the more so, perhaps, that she always kept watch over her emotions, and seemed to think it a duty to be tranquil. An interview or two with myself did her much good; she wept freely, and talked unservedly of her father.

Vaughan had had few acquaintances except the Parker Simpsons; and they now came pretty frequently to the house. The Rev. Parker Simp-

son was a good man, but not exactly winning in his manner. He was dry and gaunt, and looked at you as if he suspected you of felony, or petty larceny at least. However, as I said, he was a good man, and if deeply impressed with a conviction of the criminality of his neighbours and the public in general, was equally alive to the propriety of endeavouring to make them better.

As for Mrs. Parker Simpson, she was a stout little matronly body, possessed with two dominant ideas—the supernatural excellence of the Rev. Parker Simpson, and his unfitness for this sublunary world. “If it were not for my poor little homely commonplace gifts,” Mrs. P. S. would say, “what would become of Parker? He’s a deal too good for this world, let me tell you, Mr. Chauncey, a deal too good. He’s all spirit. As for me, I’m ‘of the earth, earthy.’ I’m only a clog to him; I know it too well. But my consolation is that society’s the gainer. Why, if it weren’t for me, Mr. Chauncey, Parker would walk off to Timbuctoo or New Zealand on the missionary line, and be boiled alive or baked in a pie by the natives! Yes, I’m a clog, I know; but I keep him where he is, in

the Rue St. Nicholas at Rouen, linked to his little flock of Christian friends."

There was another clog to the Rev. Parker Simpson's movements—his son and heir, a young gentleman of ten years old or so, whose christian name was Lollard.

Lollard was a youth of lively, not to say mischievous habits, who undoubtedly aided his mother in drawing the Rev. Parker Simpson's attention to earthly matters, whether it was a bloody nose from a fight in the street with a French urchin, a shop-window smashed by an erratic cricket-ball, or a cat howling in the back-garden with its paws neatly packed in walnut-shells. Nevertheless, Lollard was held in high estimation by both his parents; true, he was as yet only, what they termed, an undeveloped Christian, but by-and-by his energy and talent would be turned to good account.

One day the Parker Simpsons hired a calèche, and proposed to take Rosamund and myself a drive to the top of Mont St. Catherine. I had letters to write, and, though Rosamund joined in pressing me to come, was obliged to decline the invitation.

Off they went, then, on a fine autumn afternoon, Lollard Simpson perched on the box, my wife and Mrs. Parker Simpson side by side within, and Parker opposite, screwed in a diagonal attitude for the convenience of his long legs.

My letters were not finished, when I heard some one tap at the door of the sitting-room in which I was writing.

"Come in!" I said carelessly, and the door being opened, there gently glided into the room Edith Vaughan. She was, of course, in deepest mourning, and very touching was the sight of that young, delicately-beautiful face, bearing evidence by tearful eyes and pallid complexion of the sorrow that weighed down her heart.

I rose immediately, and, pressing her hand, led her to a seat.

"Dear sir, pray do not let me interrupt you; I only wish to ask when you will be disengaged."

I had an hour's work before me, but, of course, could only say I was at her service whenever she wished.

No; she would not think of that. Only when I had quite finished my letters, would I be so

good as to walk with her to the cathedral; vespers were at six.

I promised to accompany her, and forthwith returned to my letters. Write as I would, I could not, however, finish in time, and was obliged to leave a letter half-written on my table.

We sallied forth into the pleasant evening air. To tell the truth, I was a little puzzled by Miss Vaughan's desire to attend vespers; her father, if not a nonconformist, was at all events a stanch Protestant. Nevertheless we walked on, she leaning on my arm. I found that Sœur Angélique had promised to call for her, but had been summoned to the hospital. Edith could not go to the cathedral alone.

When we entered, Edith retired into a secluded aisle, and without paying attention to the service then going on, knelt down on one of the low high-backed chairs ranged in rows one behind the other, and, covering her face with her hands, apparently prayed in silence.

I felt a little strange, but amused myself by watching the people coming in and out, and listening to the guttural intonations of the officiating priest. I wandered to and fro; never far

enough, however, to lose sight of Edith. At length she rose; we went out as we came in, she taking my arm; I could not help saying—

“Miss Vaughan, I thought you were a Protestant.”

“Of course I am. Who could have told you otherwise?”

“You attend a Popish service in a Popish cathedral.”

“Well, and why not?” she rejoined. “If I were living near beautiful scenery—ocean, or mountain, or forest—I would, when I could, go forth into the midst of it to say my prayers; the sight of what is beautiful helps us to reverence the Great Creator.”

“But a cathedral is man’s work.”

“And what is man? God’s work surely; therefore that noble, awe-inspiring cathedral is, in a sense, God’s work too. God gave man the heart to feel, the mind to plan, the faith to build it; why should we shut ourselves out, because those who pray there are less wise than we? There is room for many Christian societies under that vast vaulted roof.”

I was unaccustomed to look at the matter in

this light and did not know exactly what to say. I talked of her father's religious views.

"Latterly, he frequented the Church," she said. "He was vexed by the inquisitive ways of the minister and leading people of our chapel. He used to be very stern against many things in the Established Church, and I do not know that his opinions were altered; but my father came to think there was a great blessing in the privacy and independence of members of the Church, and he found much peace and comfort in the services. 'All forms and creeds must have human alloy,' he used to say, 'but who shall say where the alloy begins? Better let things be, and wait to the end, bearing one with the other, steadfast in charity as well as faith.'"

We had not walked more than two or three hundred yards when our conversation was disagreeably interrupted.

"Aha, I saw you!" screamed a shrill voice behind us.

It was Lollard Simpson. The little imp danced round and round, grinning from ear to ear.

"I saw you in the Pope's cathedral. My papa

saw you, too—aha, we saw you! No Popery, no Popery! Aren't you ashamed?"

I hit at the young gentleman with my cane, seemingly in a sportive mood, but in reality with every wish to make him smart. His movements were so rapid that I barely touched him, but the touch was enough to send him howling back to his parents, who, with Rosamund, were approaching behind. They had returned from Mont St. Catherine, and were taking a walk through some of the old streets when Edith and myself emerged from the cathedral.

Parker Simpson looked portentously solemn. Rosamund said, rather quickly,—

"Why, Herbert, I thought you had such important letters to write!"

Mrs. Parker Simpson, discharging her function of throwing in a little worldly common-sense to make things run pleasant, cried,—

"Oh, Mr. Chauncey, Miss Vaughan and you looked so interesting, coming out of the old cathedral, both in deep mourning! 'Twas quite like a story-book to see you."

"No Popery!" whined Lollard, in the rear, keeping at a respectful distance from my cane.

“Dear, dear,” continued Mrs. Parker Simpson ;
“Lollard, where’s the Popery of just putting your
nose inside a cathedral ? ”

“He that toucheth pitch shall be defiled,” said
her husband.

I did not argue the point, and we walked home
without more words. Rosamund, that evening,
took me a little to task.

“You see, Herbert dear, you cannot be too careful in a place like this, amongst a little colony of English, how you behave towards poor Edith Vaughan. Be kind, sympathizing, friendly, as much as you will, but avoid *tête-à-tête* walks, especially *tête-à-tête* visits to vespers. It makes people talk. I am not worldly-minded, as you know, but I have lived at B—— most of my life, and know how the English gossip. ’Tis not the first time I have heard that silly Mrs. Parker Simpson talk of yourself and Miss Vaughan looking so interesting in your deep mourning. What do you think ? Yesterday, she said you were like a brother and sister, knit together in the sacred bonds of a common affliction.”

Nevertheless, once or twice I walked out with Edith ; explaining to dear Rosamund how, when

Edith asked me to accompany her, it would be cruel in the first sharpness of her affliction to refuse; by-and-by I could exercise more reserve; at present, with her father's dying entreaty lingering in my ear, I could not avoid giving her my company. Rosamund pouted her pretty lip for a second or two a very very little, but seemed to think no more of it. The only unpleasant consequence was this: Rosamund did not like Edith so much as at first; it vexed me to find it out, and I began to wish we were home again. This was how I discovered it.

Edith had begun to come down and mix more with the family; one day she was in the drawing-room with her things on, ready for taking a walk.

On leaving the room to go upstairs, I stumbled upon Winifred, engaged in the respectable occupation of listening at the keyhole.

Now, although I had said nothing to Rosamund, the remarks of my cousin Ferris respecting this dark-eyed gipsy-faced young woman, had by no means fallen on obtuse ears. I had turned what he said over and over, and could not divest myself of the fear, that Winifred, notwithstanding her

devotion to my wife and honest discharge of her duties, might be secretly in league with my cruel and indefatigable enemy. In league, perhaps, against her will; in league by compulsion; in league through the influence of one of Sir Hugh's agents—for example, Alphonse. True, she had declared at Glenarvon that all was broken off between them, and, when questioned in London, after the man was again in Sir Hugh's service, she had made the same assertion, and promised to hold no intercourse with him. But of what worth were a lady's-maid's promises?

Altogether then, I regarded Winifred with very uncomfortable feelings, and abruptly encountering her, with her ear almost at the key-hole of the door, those feelings found vent in an explosion of indignation. I took her by the wrist, and, drawing her into an adjoining room not to disturb the household, said,—

“How dare you stand listening at the door? Where did you learn these dishonest, disreputable tricks? How long have you practised them? Now, Winifred, I tell you what. Your conduct has often puzzled me; I have felt at times doubtful of your honesty. What I have now seen con-

firms my suspicions. You will leave my service at the end of your month."

At first, Winifred showed the usual signals of feminine distress and alarm. Large tears gathered in her black eyes, she trembled all over, up went her apron to her face. No sooner, however, had she heard me out, than her manner changed; she wiped her eyes, folded her arms, curtsied respectfully, then drew herself up to her full height, and, in what struck me almost as a cheerful voice, cried,—

"Yes, sir. It's much better we should part. It hurts me to leave my dear young mistress; but it's much better. Yes, sir, much better."

At that moment Rosamund entered the room; I turned, and briefly explained the state of the case.

"Dear Herbert, I wish you would not be so hasty. Pray allow me to manage my own maid."

"My dear, I found her listening at the key-hole."

"Well, it's for me to judge whether that's a crime for which she ought to be turned away. Winifred, you may go downstairs for the pre-

sent." Then, taking my hands, Rosamund said, laughing,—

"You ferocious tyrant, beg my pardon. How dare you interfere with my lady's-maid?"

"Eavesdropping, my dear, is abominable."

"Pooh, nonsense; I will explain it all. The fact is I didn't want to meet Edith Vaughan, and sent Winifred to find out whether she was in the drawing-room, and, if so, to let me know when she went out. That's all."

I was vexed and hurt.

"A poor orphan girl, daughter of your husband's dear friend! I did not think you would shun her."

"No, no. I want to be kind to her; but you see we don't suit; we are of different natures. We are happier apart; it can't be helped; 'tis neither her fault nor mine."

We talked some time, but to little effect. It ended in Rosamund's turning crimson, biting her lip, crying out it was evident I liked Edith Vaughan much better than my own wife; it was not the first time I had shown it, as my conscience would tell me; then running out for a solitary walk on the boulevards.

The storm soon blew over, and my darling was as kind as ever, but my position began to be rather embarrassing.

Loving my wife, tenderly and deeply, I had a duty to discharge towards Miss Vaughan. But I felt under constraint whenever I conversed with Edith in Rosamund's presence; and when I conversed with her in Rosamund's absence, my conscience was ever asking me—Would you have done or said that if your wife were looking on?

I was not sorry when letters arrived from my solicitor informing me that an attempt to postpone the trial of Ferris *versus* Chauncey had failed, and that it would certainly come on at the ensuing assizes at Stoke-upon-Avon, Meadshire.

It was necessary to return home immediately. Before we started, I rejoiced to notice that Rosamund seemed to take more kindly to Miss Vaughan. She took walks with her, and made her one or two handsome presents. It struck me, and Rosamund agreed, that we might escort the poor girl to England; the Dinders had offered her a home, and, being relations, were the fittest

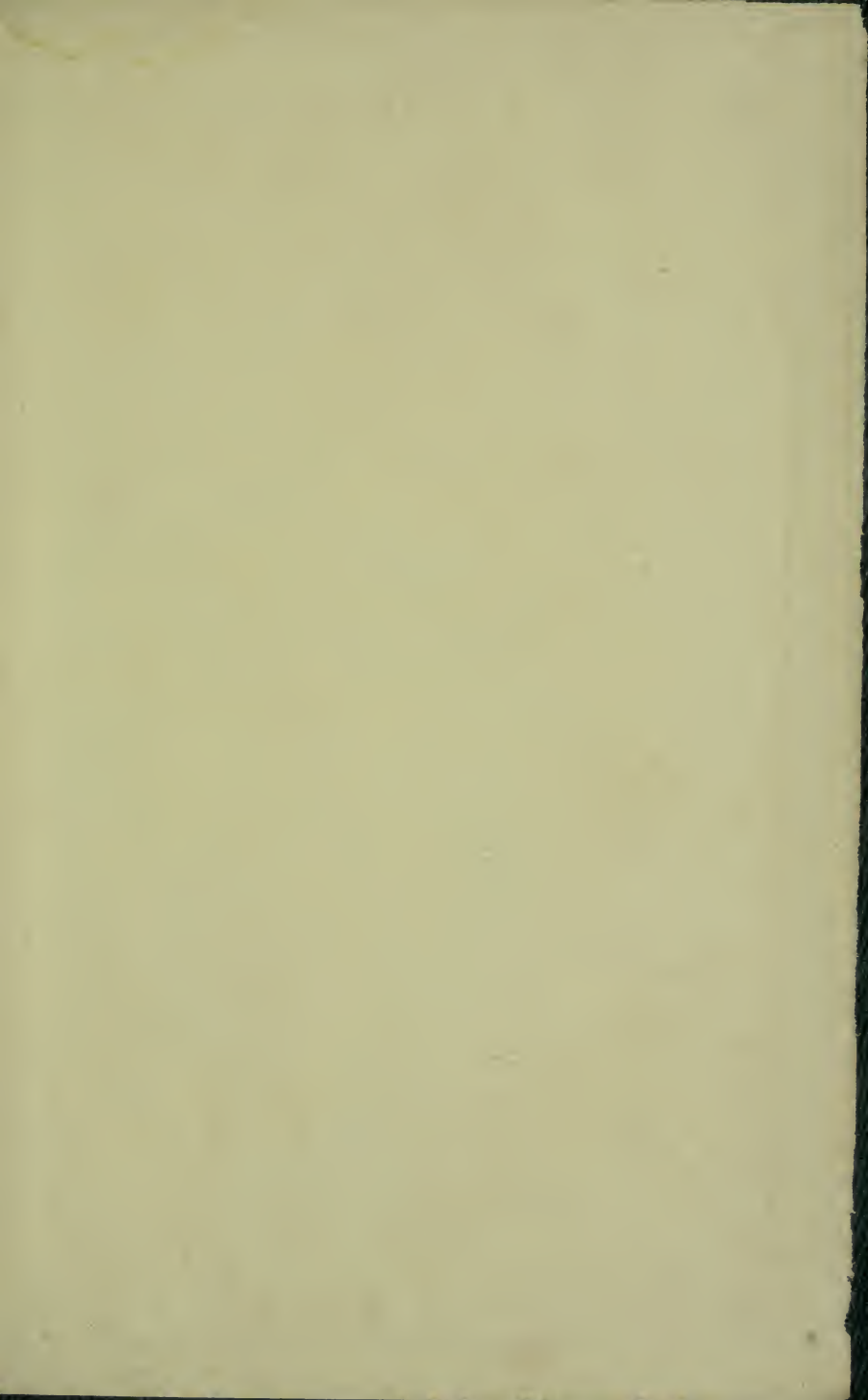
persons to do so. Edith, however, preferred remaining until the business affairs of her late father were wound up.

We, therefore, bade farewell for the present, and started for England, full of the approaching trial.

END OF VOL. II.



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